We do not presume...

A beginner's guide to

Anglican life and thought

RICHARD GILES

We do not presume ...

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An Anglican approach to life and thought

Richard Giles

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To my beloved community
of St Thomas' Huddersfield

'MEDIUM TENUERE BEATI'

'The blessed held the middle course'

Fireplace inscription, Relais St Vincent,
Ligny-le-Chatel, Champagne

I love our church and never will I depart from it. I've been frustrated by the structures of the church, angered sometimes by her policies, and sometimes uninspired by her worship. And in spite of that, I love her, because through her the living God has made himself known to me. I love her, because her way of doing theology appeals to me, I love her, in spite of her deficiencies (no church is perfect or infallible).

She is my home and I will gladly die in her.

Archbishop George Carey
speaking at the 'Doors of Hope' Conference of the
Wakefield Diocese, Harrogate, 13 September 1997

Sir Anthony Absolute (raging)

Zounds! sirrah! the lady shall be as ugly as I choose: she shall have a lump on each shoulder; she shall be as crooked as the crescent; her one eye shall roll like the bull's in Cox's Museum; she shall have a skin like a mummy, and the beard of a Jew – she shall be all this, sirrah – yet I will make you ogle her all day, and sit up all night to write sonnets on her beauty.

Richard Sheridan, *The Rivals*

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1

Introduction

Being Rather Than Doing

As I sat in Costa's bar beside the harbour at Halki, a tiny island in the Dodecanese, it was a nice surprise to find that all the holidaymakers at our table were practising Christians of one kind or another. As we ordered a further round of metaxas we were comforted in our self-indulgence by the smile from the Orthodox parish priest at the next table. As Romans, Anglicans and Protestants around that table got stuck into some friendly banter, it was good to think that in Greece, no Western Christian is in any position to throw his or her weight about. No one can pull rank, for the simple reason that we all fall short of the mark. As far as our friendly Orthodox priest was concerned, we were *all* beyond the pale, Pope John Paul along with Mr Paisley.

So what exactly do our different traditions have to offer? More particularly, how could I retain my identity as an Anglican amidst this oh-so-different culture at the other end of Europe? What might Anglicans have to offer that no one else could supply, what characteristics did we have that made us distinctive, different? In many ways it was easier for the others around the table, for being other than Anglican meant that you belonged to a community of faith that had 'opted out' of the Established Church and was thereby confident in its special role and well-rehearsed in the reasons for its distinctiveness. This applies not only to England, but also to those places to which England exported its religious quarrels, notably in the settlement of North America.

For Anglicans it has always been more difficult, for it has sometimes seemed that we are simply what is left once you have extracted all those with passions to proclaim, placards to parade, or axes to grind. When all those who are distinctive and different have gone off to the crusades, we are the ones left at home by the fireside, companionable and undemanding. We are the residual church, the bland leading the bland.

But is it really like that? Surely we have a very special, if seemingly indefinable, instinctive way of doing things which is essentially Anglican? Do we not have something to treasure, something to offer, something so typically 'us' that even the glorious and incomparable liturgy of the Orthodox Church might pall after a time, and cause us to pine for evensong in a country church – wheezing harmonium, lousy sermon and all?

I have written these notes with some particular friends in mind: a group of adult confirmation candidates from a variety of backgrounds – some Roman Catholics, some Pentecostal – who have found themselves at home in the parish I serve, and who now want to know more about the Anglican middle way. But whoever or wherever you may be, I hope that by reading this little book you will find something of value in our Anglican approach that might encourage you to keep us company on our journey home to God. Perhaps something might even become so special to you that you would never again let it go, but guard it as lovingly as the treasure hidden in the field.

This task is not without its difficulties. First, everyone already knows everything there is to know about the 'dear old C of E' and its sister churches, or *thinks* they do. Anglicanism is immediately accessible, totally amenable, and without guile, so everyone feels entitled to become an instant expert on its strange habits. The Anglican Church exhibits neither hauteur nor secrecy; it is an open book.

Second, the Church of England (and the Anglican

Communion as a whole) often appears to exist chiefly for the purpose of keeping God amused, and indeed that's no mean calling. It is truly a wonderful, and sometimes comical, creation; a church quite unlike any other, which defies most attempts to classify or tame it, but which is all the stronger for not taking itself too seriously. Certainly it will drive you mad at times, for it lacks the machinery necessary for enforcing the party line, and has neither the ruthlessness to expel the intruder nor the earnestness always to get off its backside as quickly as it should. If you persevere, you will become exasperated and sometimes angry. You will not find in Anglicanism a structure of cast-iron certainties bolted securely one on top of another, but neither will you have to suspend your rational thought processes upon entering our doors.

You will find in Anglican tradition a consistent holistic approach in which faith is not holed up in a separate 'religious' compartment but is part of life. It offers no safe havens or cocoons in which we can evade the piercing eyes of the same Jesus who had only to look at Peter (Luke 22:61) to say all there was to be said. Anglicanism will offer you life on the road with Jesus of Nazareth, with the same certainties and doubts experienced by his first group of followers, as they struggled to keep up with him along all those dusty miles, grappling with the puzzle of who on earth this strange and wonderful man could be.

So if you are in the mood for an adventure, and can cope with a degree of uncertainty along the way, able to enjoy the journeying as much as the arriving, then read on.

2

What's in a Name?

Perhaps the first thing to do is to have a look at this word 'Anglican'. There are still many people in the Church of England who look rather surprised when you tell them they are Anglicans; some even think you mean Anglo-Catholics (we'll come to that later). This is because until comparatively recently (say from the middle of the twentieth century), it sufficed to say you were 'Church' as distinct from 'chapel' or 'C of E' as distant from 'RC'.

'Anglican' has now come into regular use to describe all or any of the churches across the world which have sprung from the Church of England – originally in areas colonized by the British, and subsequently in other parts of the world where Britons were to be found living, trading, and getting the locals to sit in straight lines while they were told the good news that God was an Englishman.

So it is that today, you will find quaint little eccentricities, peculiar historical hangovers, popping up in various corners of the earth, all part of this weird and wonderful Anglican legacy of Englishness. Thus you can track down, should you so wish, high-tech Texans addressing God in archaic English coined centuries before their state was born, or black bishops in the remotest parts of Africa sweltering under the weight of convocation robes, white ruffs and all, designed for sixteenth-century English winters. There we go ... keeping God amused again.

The Anglican Communion got off to a very shaky start as an international body, indicative of the weaknesses inherent

in a system suspicious of centralized authority. In a staggering lack of visionary and strategic thinking (nothing changes!), the English Church made no provision for episcopal oversight in the American Colonies following the settlement of Virginia in 1607. There was no concept of missionary work, and for nearly two hundred years, settlements were staffed by state chaplains working under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London(!) It was left to Anglican bishops in Scotland to cut through the complacency and prevarication by consecrating in 1784 the first bishop to serve in the United States, Samuel Seabury.[1] Gradually thereafter the term 'Anglican' came into use more and more to satisfy conflicting needs: to satisfy the growing desire for political independence, and at the same time to recall us to our common roots.

In the British Isles, a varied patchwork of Anglican activity has emerged from the turmoil of the centuries. Whereas the English Church remains Established, the Irish Church was disestablished in 1869, in a move reflecting the deepening religious and political divides in that country. The Welsh Church followed suit in 1920, in response to growing demands from Nonconformists that the privileged position of the Established Church in Wales should be brought to an end. In Scotland, Anglicanism emerged as a separate body only after the long, drawn-out battle to make the Established Church of Scotland episcopal was finally lost with the accession of William and Mary in 1689. So today we have four different churches responding to four very different situations, working closely together but administered separately: an Anglican Communion in miniature.

Further afield it made less and less sense politically for churches founded as a by-product of British colonialism, and remaining in communion with Canterbury, to be lumbered with the word 'England' in their names. 'The Church of England in Australia' for example might once have been a selling point for home-sick settlers hanging up their harps by

a lonely billabong, but is an absolute no-no for first-generation republicans swilling down their Fosters and telling not-so-complimentary jokes about Limeys. Such a name-tag is doomed once any nation comes of age.

After the Second World War the old Empire disintegrated apace, and many new ecclesiastical provinces were founded as former dominions and colonies strove to match political independence with autonomy in church life. At the same time there was no wish to sever the links with Canterbury or to deny our common heritage, and a growing sense of belonging to a worldwide Anglican Communion helped cement together churches in sometimes widely disparate nation states.

Anglicans in the United States were the brains behind a swanky magazine called 'Anglican World' in the 1960s, which gave things a healthy shove forward. The magazine, which is now published by the Anglican Communion office in London, was but one example of the growing self-awareness of Anglicans worldwide. It helped enormously to instil in all those in communion with the See of Canterbury, in whatever continent they found themselves, a sense of belonging and identity and of their unique contribution to the Christian story. For Christians of English descent no longer wishing to be tied to mother's apron strings, it would be difficult to conceive of a better name than 'Anglican', which recalled all those of Canterbury stock to the ancient name of the English Church – *Ecclesia Anglicana* – without mentioning the dreaded E word.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, by virtue of his office as senior bishop in the Anglican Communion – first among equals – continues to exercise a particular ministry of unity, in which affection is more significant than authority. In addition, the Anglican Communion has a network of mutual support and communication in the Lambeth Conference (the consultative gathering of all Anglican bishops, which now takes place once every ten years), the regular meetings of the

Primates of the Anglican Provinces, and the work of the Anglican Consultative Council. Holding together a communion of such incredible diversity and independence of spirit is sometimes a headache, but somehow we manage it.

So then, becoming an Anglican is a far far bigger and better thing than simply joining the Church in England, for a new member is incorporated into a worldwide federation of thirty-seven churches containing five hundred dioceses and about seven million members.

And yet ... wherever you go within the Anglican Communion, you will encounter a certain Englishness, in the instinctive approach if no longer in the name. In its interpretation of the ancient creeds, the Church of England has evolved a distinctive ethos in which the words restraint, understatement and self-deprecation spring to mind, alongside beauty and dignity, excellence and unassuming godly wisdom. It values freedom and distrusts centralization. It has a distaste for extremism of any kind.

Anglicanism, wherever it is encountered, is no place for the triumphalist. On the whole it stays humble before the mysteries of God and (somewhat too) self-effacing before men. The fundamentalist has an unhappy time too, for Anglicanism has little time for idolatry, whether of unerring Scripture or infallible Pope. But Anglicanism knows about reverence, and at the same time about being at home with God; about dignified and glorious worship and at the same time about maintaining a sense of proportion and a sense of humour.

And of course, Anglicanism today embraces millions of fellow pilgrims from vastly differing cultures with whom we share so rich an inheritance, and whose fresh expressions of Anglican life constantly make our story more and more worth the telling.

3

To Begin at the Beginning

Anglicanism is not a 'religion' of course, (no more than Roman Catholicism or Methodism), but simply a tradition within the one Christian religion, offering a distinctive interpretation of the old faith, but nothing new. Geoffrey Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1945 to 1961, was fond of reminding us that the Church of England has no creeds of its own, only those of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, undivided between East and West.[1]

Although 'Anglican' is an adjective adopted into common usage only during this century, to be an Anglican in England is to belong to an ancient church, *the* ancient church of this country. This gets up other people's noses somewhat, but there it is. Even Anglican self-effacement cannot stretch to despising its own birthright, although the ignorance of the media (even of the so-called quality newspapers) misleads many into believing the fable that the Church of England was an invention of Tudor times.

It was not, of course, Henry VIII who founded the Church of England, but the unknown missionary who first ran his boat on to the shingle of our shores in foolhardy eagerness to share the good news of Jesus of Nazareth with the fierce tribesmen of this wild and wet island. Perhaps even more likely, it was the unknown Roman soldier who ran the gauntlet of barrack-room abuse to admit his allegiance to a Galilean freedom-fighter executed by their emperor two hundred years before. No one knows exactly when, or by what route, the good news came, but the date of the death of

the first British martyr, Alban, has been placed as early as 209. Certainly, British bishops were present at the Council of Arles in 314, so things must have been up and running by then.

In other words, the Church of England is simply the Church of the English people, the English Church, *Ecclesia Anglicana*: its title relating not to a denominational formula, but simply to a geographical delineation. Over the last seventeen centuries or so, it has undergone innumerable changes and transformations, looping the loop a few times but always returning to base.

Not surprisingly, the most traumatic changes concern our on-off relations with Rome, the mother of the Western Church of which the Church of England remains a part. Although we cut the apron strings some time ago, we never forget Mothering Sunday. Sadly, mother cannot yet bring herself to invite us back for Sunday lunch.

More than three hundred years after Christianity was brought to these islands, the Christian community here was eventually brought under the jurisdiction of Rome after the arrival in 597 of the Italian missionary-monk Augustine; nearly a thousand years later, in 1570, the link was finally severed upon the accession of Elizabeth I. This break was, on both sides of the dispute, political as much as theological, with those in England who sought power and wealth, harnessing and manipulating to their own ends the ferment of new theological ideas then sweeping the continent.

It is almost impossible for us now to conceive what life in the fast lane must have been like in mid sixteenth-century Tudor England. Europe was having its mind blown apart by the hard drug of a radical theology emanating from Germany (again nothing changes!) which renounced entirely the notion that the hierarchy of the Church could maintain the hitherto unquestioned monopoly – and a profitable one at that – in the trade between man and God. The Church of the West – i.e. the Church centred on Rome rather than Constantinople

– began to disintegrate, as theologians in Germany, Switzerland, and then England, exchanged ideas and egged each other on with increasing excitement at this revolution in thought, known as the Reformation, which was to change for ever the face of Christian practice and worship.

It wasn't long before kings and princes cottoned on to the political potential of this cataclysmic change, realizing that it provided the opportunity for a convenient revolution of another kind, against the spiritual imperialism of the papacy and its hit-man, the leader of the Habsburg dynasty, still styled rather quaintly 'the Holy Roman Emperor'.

In England's case, the king happened to be Henry VIII, who combined a vindictive hot temper with intense bouts of religious mania – a volatile mixture which made life for those around him a bit like a game of Russian roulette. What was orthodoxy yesterday could be heresy by the morning, and the wrong answer to the test question could result not merely in a failed paper but in a slow and agonizing death.

The theologian who came out on top at the time was Thomas Cranmer, an academic and career diplomat whose meteoric rise to the Archbishopric of Canterbury was due almost entirely to his negotiating skills on Henry's behalf in the little matter of the annulment of the king's first marriage to Catherine of Aragon, who had failed to bear him an heir. Although Cranmer failed to deliver the goods in this instance, Henry realized that, given Cranmer's increasingly anti-Roman views (he it was who first declared the pope to be none other than the antichrist of 1 John 2:18), he would be just the man to mastermind a complete break from Rome, should diplomacy finally prove fruitless. Cranmer fitted the bill perfectly because he abhorred the power vacuum created by the deletion of the Pope's name from Henry's Christmas card list, and he immediately set to work with enthusiasm to fill the gap, digging deep into his Old Testament to crank up the dubious but convenient doctrine of the anointed king. Henry, supported by Cranmer, duly appointed himself 'the

only supreme head in earth of the Church of England, called *Anglicana Ecclesia*'.[2]

Thus it was that Henry's obsessional search for a male heir and his passionate interest in religious ideas (the Pope had declared him 'Defender of the Faith' before their falling-out) was complemented perfectly in an archbishop anxious to reshape the English Church. Each seized the opportunity provided by this moment of mutual need, and pursued his own agenda. Piggy-in-the-middle was the dear old C of E, which in the process simply exchanged one form of totalitarianism for another.

Cranmer would be seen by some as a Margaret Thatcher type, in that he began sensibly enough with badly needed reforms (ending abuses, attacking superstition, translating the Bible and giving us a Mass in English) but then proceeded to lose all sense of proportion. Whereas Mrs Thatcher wasn't European enough, Cranmer was a little too keen on Europe, especially on the hot-headed Reformers from Switzerland for whom Martin Luther was a dubious conservative.

Although in the early years after the break with Rome, conservatives and reformers were equally matched, Cranmer gradually gained the upper hand, and in a decidely un-Anglican manner abandoned all pretence of moderation as he pressed home his advantage. He sat by while the monasteries were dissolved and the religious orders suppressed (doing his own sister out of a job in the process[3]), and led the way in the abolition of time-honoured ceremonies and the destruction of the shrines of the saints and of all images in our parish churches. The successive Prayer Books which Cranmer master-minded and enriched with his own special liturgical genius, also reveal an escalating tendency to renounce the old and embrace the new, with an increasing intolerance typical of the convert.

But as we were saying, yesterday's orthodoxy was tomorrow's heresy, and when Henry's eldest daughter Mary ascended the throne, the pendulum swung back the other

way, and Cranmer himself went to his death. It wasn't until the reign of Elizabeth I, Henry's daughter by Anne Boleyn, that some form of equilibrium was established, and a proper Anglican balance achieved between conservation and change.

This was England after all, and in the end these foreign theological ideas were not swallowed wholesale, but merely allowed to trickle down the throat. Those who worked to renew and reform the Church of England in this time of upheaval were very careful to maintain continuity between old and new. Before and after the break with Rome, almost without exception, the same priests in the same parish churches continued to lead and to minister to the same communities of faith, and where new cathedrals were created from old abbeys, it was often the last abbot in the old order who became first bishop in the new. For most people, life just went on as before, and in those days – before the term 'quality of life' had been invented – mere survival was considered a bonus. Despite the introduction of new liturgies in the vernacular, together with an English version of the Scriptures[4], a sense of continuity was given by the same people gathering in the same church building, with the same old priest, albeit looking a little more harassed and careworn, perhaps now with a wife as well as a bishop to keep happy.

Despite the upheaval and, at times, distress, the sense of continuity remained undimmed. Those who faithfully made their way to the parish church each Sunday knew they belonged to the ancient Church of this land, a Church which had seen popes and princes come and go, and which would continue to be the Church of the English people, whatever anybody did or said. The Reformers recognized this and were intent on a return to the primitive Church, not the creation of a new one. They had no interest in building a new house, only in spring-cleaning the old one.[5]

A recent crisis in our household saw my sixteen-year-old daughter's white top come out of the washing machine

looking decidedly pink. This required a dash to town and the purchase of a strong red dye to make a virtue out of necessity: hey presto, a new red top! Relief all round and domestic harmony re-established. Only it wasn't new of course. It was the same old top, every fibre of it, but given a new look. The Church of England was given a completely new look at the Reformation, but it was the same Church, fibre for fibre.

It was the conviction of those who refurbished the English Church in the sixteenth century that it was perfectly possible to be a good Catholic without submitting oneself to the bishop of Rome. In this, Anglicans keep company with the 350 million-strong Orthodox communion which is of the same opinion, and who in 1054 went so far as to excommunicate the Pope, just in case anyone was in any doubt about the matter. (But this excommunication was annulled in 1965 so perhaps it will take only another 900 years for us all to be good friends again.)

The Church of England is therefore a Christian body which is both Catholic (in that it prizes and enjoys an unbroken continuity[6] of Christian life and witness within the framework of an episcopal, sacramental Church), and Reformed (in that it is heir to the liberating insights of the Reformation, and delights in Scripture as a life-giving resource and as the only authority essential for Christian doctrines). In this the Anglican Communion is in a unique position to serve as a 'house of reconciliation' for all the churches, presenting a realistic *modus vivendi* of how Christians of different cultures and religious instincts can live together in unity. If we can do it, anyone can!

Like all great Christian traditions, Anglicanism does not simply look back to the past, resting on brown and brittle laurels like last year's Christmas wreath, but has exhibited the energy over the centuries to renew itself many times. These movements of renewal have reinvigorated the Church, often at times of spiritual torpor, by recalling it to a

particular aspect of its many-faceted heritage, or to a characteristic which had long lain dormant.

In the late eighteenth century for example, the Evangelical Revival[7] led by Henry Venn, John Newton, and later Charles Simeon, sought to give a fresh vision to a Church beset by worldliness and served by a clergy prone to negligence. The Bible, and only the Bible, was the movement's touchstone, and the individual believer's heart and mind the battle ground. Evangelicals were concerned above all with conversion as a recognizable moment of turning one's life over to God, an event made possible solely by the grace of God accessed through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The Evangelical Revival recalled a rather frivolous Church to the serious business of living and preaching the Christian gospel, and was not always thanked for spoiling the fun with its sober earnestness. It gave a new fervour and urgency to missionary work abroad (founding the Church Missionary Society in 1799, one among many such societies springing up at that time) and to dedicated pastoral care at home (founding the Church Pastoral Aid Society in 1836). The movement reminded the Church it had serious work to do, for which the essential prerequisite was the conversion of the individual sinner through faith in the atoning death of Christ.

Since the Second World War, Evangelicals in the Church of England have emerged from the shadows to become the dominant force in the Church today, leading the way in numerical growth, lively and joyful worship, evangelistic outreach into new areas and in the number of candidates offering themselves for the ordained ministry. The present Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, and many senior bishops stand firmly in this tradition.

Complementary to this renewal of individual hearts and minds was the renewal of the Church understood as a sacred body called into being by God. This emphasis came to be called the High Church movement, and was kept alive

throughout the seventeenth century by the Caroline Divines and by the Nonjurors – the nine bishops (including the Archbishop of Canterbury) and four hundred clergy who in 1688 refused to take the Oath of Allegiance to William and Mary, and were deprived as a result.

It was not until the 1830s however that the flame was fanned into a blaze. In 1833 an audacious sermon preached at Oxford by a priest-academic called John Keble was to change everything. The newly-elected Whig administration of the day proposed, on grounds of economy, to suppress ten Irish bishoprics. Keble seized upon this threatened incursion by the secular power to reaffirm the nature of the Church as a holy creation of God, not a mere man-made institution.

Keble entitled his sermon, preached before the Assize Judges in the University Church, 'National Apostasy', and his aim was to promote action in defence of the Church in the face of the State's encroaching powers. In a way which no doubt took the gentle Keble by surprise, the Church reacted as a giant suddenly aroused from sleep, and in the years that followed set about with gusto the task of reclaiming its sacred birthright.

The Church of England was awakened to its holy calling and vocation as the ancient Catholic Church of this country, giving a fresh emphasis to apostolic order, ordained ministry, the sacraments, the religious life and liturgy (though not ritualism, which was a later development). Its leading lights were, in addition to Keble himself, Edward Pusey and John Henry Newman. Although Newman was later to defect to Rome, the main body of the movement continued within the Church of England to enrich it with a sense of history and of sacred commission.

The Oxford Movement was throughout a very Anglican movement, determined to find within the Prayer Book the justification for every practice it encouraged, convinced that the Church of England had no need to look elsewhere to establish its credentials.[8] Today the spiritual heirs of the

Oxford Movement (and of the seventeenth-century High Church movement which preceeded it) are known as the Catholic wing of the Church.[9] In keeping with the English sense of fair play, the present Archbishop of York stands firmly in this tradition.

Other renewal movements have followed, such as the Parish Communion Movement, beginning before the Second World War but flowering fully after it, which sought to establish the Eucharist as the main Sunday service in every parish. Originally there was a breakfast to follow, expressing the corporate life awakened by the Eucharist properly understood, and although it is now usually truncated to a cup of coffee, the point remains.

The Parish Communion Movement was itself a manifestation of the wider Liturgical Movement, which had begun among Roman Catholic communities on the continent in the early twentieth century. It recaptured the Eucharist for the people of God, rescuing it from the sanctuary – where it had become a spectacle to observe, the sacrament an object to adore – and making it once again a participation by the whole people of God in a sacred meal which made present the reality of Christ. These insights had dramatic repercussions on the architecture of churches, showing us how the design of worship can be a means of understanding who we are and where we came from as the people of God.[10]

More recently, the Charismatic Renewal Movement – or more simply, the Renewal Movement – has recalled the Church to the freshness of its first love for God. By an emphasis on the initial period of Christian history described in the Acts of the Apostles, this movement has reminded us of the direct access we have to the life and power of God, and to the gifts and ministries inherent in every church and made available once we ask the Spirit of God to allow us to experience them. It has also restored confidence and boldness to a Church that in many areas had become demoralized, enabling worship to become the 'song of them that triumph'

rather than the squawks of a church whistling in the dark. 'Arise, shine, for your light has come!' was typical of the triumphant scriptural phrases set to music in the 1960s as the Church once again woke from its slumber.

The Renewal Movement, although common to all Christian traditions, has done the Church of England particular service in giving us a new unity undreamt of thirty years ago. In this experience, the Spirit has made good our deficiencies by pointing out that Christian maturity lies in complementing our own insights with those of others, previously scorned or neglected. In this way the movement has made good sacramental Catholics of Evangelicals, and scriptural Evangelicals of Catholics. The old labels are rapidly fading into insignificance.

This balance of influences, hard won over many centuries, has slowly and painfully equipped the Church of England to understand both sides of any argument, a virtue often derided as a vice but which seems to get a favourable mention in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:9). The Church of England, since the sixteenth century at least, has been consistent in its respect for the monarchy, but at bottom we are realists rather than royalists. The times they are a-changing, and come the republic we shall carry on just as before, quietly praying for those in authority and helping the nation to make a go of it. We've been through such things before.

The *Via Media*,[11] is a noble calling (was Newman ever really happy after abandoning it?), and it requires nerve to stay calm when all around you are losing their heads, diving into ditches on either side of the road, unable any longer to stay on the straight path of fearless enquiry and adventurous faith. The Church of England is not ashamed to be called the middle way, for when that path is examined humbly and prayerfully, it is found to be the lonely path that Jesus trod between the conflicting categories of wonder worker and political hero.

4

Building Blocks

Essential Elements of Anglicanism

Strictly speaking, and theologically speaking, the four articles of faith comprising the Lambeth Quadrilateral[1] (Scripture, Creed, Sacraments and Episcopate) are the building blocks of Anglicanism, and we shall look closer at these in Chapter 5. Right now, however, in keeping with the mood of this book, I want to stick to instinctive approaches rather than doctrinal formularies. What might these instinctive approaches be? I would suggest the following, with none to be taken in isolation but each as a necessary part of the whole.

Common Sense

Throughout this book we will discern again and again this very English characteristic breaking through into the closely guarded worlds of theology, doctrine and canon law, to claim for the ordinary person the treasures which would otherwise be hoarded away behind locked doors.

Anglicans demand of the theologian a ready explanation that can be applied to daily life. They are impatient of very long books without pictures, and want to see some action, some movement, some glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. In matters theological Anglicans seek simple and solid food, and in rejecting gobbledegook render the theologians a great service in rescuing them from pomposity and a lifetime of fruitless research inapplicable to the real world.

Anglicans above all are pragmatists, followers of the Great Pragmatist of Nazareth who, in telling the story of the two sons, one of whom was full of wind and one of whom got the job done, came down heavily on the side of work rather than words (Matt. 21:28). The son commended in the story had bad manners, no theology and was moody to boot, and yet he delivered the goods. His brother, so full of good intentions and a favourite with every auntie at Christmastime, turned out to be a dud.

We Anglicans likewise are keen to know what actually works. What will help get us through this 'vale of tears', or just this one pig of a day, with a chance of sanity and contentment at the end? What can we get our hands on, what stays still long enough for us to navigate by, what can we taste and see? We treat those who have privileged positions in the Church with affection and respect but not with awe. We are Levellers at heart, though unlike our namesakes of the seventeenth century, we don't get excited enough to organize mutinies.

Geniality

This inability to take ourselves too seriously – either as pundits or punters – is part and parcel of the Anglican's genial approach to life in general. This attribute can infuriate those impatient for change, but such exasperation can be fruitful – as when, every once in a while, we give birth to a prophet to be a voice crying in the wooliness. Our prophets are not usually that wild, and can be invited back to tea with some confidence. More often than not they are loved back into the fold (or given preferment), having in the meantime prodded the Church, not beaten it to a pulp.

The Anglican is like a man who wears a baggy suit of clothes. For all of us this is usually a more comfortable experience than wearing a size too small. The opposite of a church which is 'too big for its boots', the Anglican

Communion never draws itself up to its full height. It is content to slouch around in this over-large suit, living comfortably within boundaries of generous proportions. It can shift around inside them, wriggle a bit, and always seem relaxed, very much at home with itself.

As a result, the Anglican rarely has 'edge'. He or she is not always trying to prove an ecclesiastical point, or grinding a theologiocal axe as a means of establishing superiority. Although the Church of England is notoriously middle-class, in this respect at least it reveals itself as top-drawer. It feels no need to work at being what it is, and so is devoid of all pretentiousness. If the earl gets mistaken for the gardener, it's a hoot not a disaster.

Generosity

The Anglican is by instinct a generous soul. Our community is one which is reluctant to draw lines, to define, to exclude. As a result it gets itself into all kinds of scrapes with those who at times (in the media or in General Synod) demand to know what the hell is going on. What is going on is that we are trying our very best to reproduce the life of Jesus of Nazareth in a diverse worldwide community entering the third millennium. If it wasn't such a holy task we would call it the devil's own job, but you know what I mean.

At times, this generosity of spirit means that the way forward will lie in not asking questions to which you know the answer. At the time of writing there is considerable pressure on the leadership of the Church of England to make explicit what has been quietly going on for decades, the ordination of homosexuals. But to accede to these demands is not the Anglican way. Scripture is not clear and the Church has yet to come to a common mind on the issue; if an answer is demanded at this moment it must necessarily be 'no'. Far better let the matter rest for now, without making a major song and dance about it, either way.

I am writing this section in a house in Cumbria lent by a generous friend, an Anglican of course and a churchwarden to boot. She lives alone without dependants, and yet has purchased a holiday home here with no less than four bedrooms. Obviously this is quite unnecessary for her own needs, but wonderful for inviting all kinds of people – impecunious priests in particular – to bring themselves, their wives, children, mothers and dogs, to live for a few days in delightful surroundings. The Anglican Church too has been generous in its provision, there is room for everyone and their friends; Tom, Dick and even Harriet are more than welcome. Anglicanism is above all hospitable. It keeps open house and rarely if ever asks to check invitation cards at the door.

It is entirely appropriate that the Christian community which, on the mad-cap West Coast of the USA, is leading the way in unconditional eucharistic hospitality, is an Anglican one – St Gregory of Nyassa, San Francisco. Here the prophetic act of Jesus of sharing meals with all and sundry, no questions asked, is retranslated for today with an architectural and theological immediacy, as we shall see in Chapter Twelve, which is a powerful sign of the Kingdom. It was always likely to be an Anglican community that dared to reverse the normal running order of liturgical spaces in order to throw a party, because that's the way we are.

Our much celebrated/much maligned Anglican comprehensiveness is born, not of weakness or uncertainty, but out of a desire to pack everyone in if we possibly can – the more the merrier. We wish to see no-one turned away, and if people wish to slip away later without saying thank you, then that's their own affair. Of course we can become over-generous and indulgent, rather than loving and kind. Currently, for example, the 'severance package' for those clergy who cannot accept women priests is almost suicidally generous in terms of financial provision and the time allowed for making up one's mind. We can also observe such generosity at work in

the appointments procedures, in which endless consultation as often as not promotes the safe bet and threatens to rob us of inspired, incisive leadership.

Nevertheless, despite all our well-intentioned bungling, we cling to the hope that we are on the right trail. We have a hunch that this welcome-mat way of carrying on has something to do with Jesus' vision for the Kingdom, where the riff-raff are found there ahead of us.

Doing things properly

I nearly called this section 'traditionalism' but couldn't quite bring myself to do so in the face of all that bold experimentation on the West Coast. Still, perhaps 'doing things properly' boils down to the same thing. Anglicans like things done well, and often this means done as they've always been done; we are an instinctively conservative lot on the whole. This is a pain for anyone called to a little moving and shaking, but at the same time has to be recognized as a major ingredient of the glue that has held us together all these centuries.

A look at the concept of ministry within the Church will immediately reveal us in our true colours. If anyone should ever doubt which side of the Reformation bed we jumped out of to begin our new life of independence from Rome, we have only to consider our deeply held conviction that important jobs can only be carried out by people with bits of white plastic round their necks, and very important jobs only by men in purple shirts. In proper parlance, this simply means we have a very high regard for episcopacy.

The down-side of this reverence for episcopally ordained ministry is that we have tended to clericalize anything that moves 'up front'. So the Lay Reader is trussed up in a blue scarf, the server dressed up in an alb, and (most ridiculous of all) the singer in cassock, surplice and ruff, in order to carry out crypto-sacerdotal activities (like handling the collection plate) in the holy of holies behind the altar rail.

All this is changing rapidly as we rediscover the vision of the first Christian communities with their dynamic concept of ministry as a whole host of gifts brought to the assembly of the faithful by every single member, to be celebrated and shared under the presidency of the overseer who was both authorized from above and affirmed from below.

Our innate conservatism has, however, played an important role in preserving us over the centuries from the worst excesses of the iconoclast so that we hold together treasures both old and new. We are a bit slower on the uptake than churches with a strong centralized structure or not much structure at all. We allow people to hedge their bets over the simplest step forward (such as the current liturgical revision), but we somehow get there in the end, and are all the more certain of our choices for having taken our time to decide.

Exploration

Our conservatism is only half the story (and fortunately not quite a full 50 per cent), for Anglicans, despite all the pressures to go on doing things they've always done, also have a proud record of breaking new ground. T. S. Eliot's affirmation that 'we shall not cease from exploration' is a good maxim for all Anglicans.[2] Our size, strength, depth, variety and occasional bloody-mindedness are enough to guarantee that we are always setting out on new journeys, for above all we are a people of *hope*. We believe travel in itself to be a godly thing,[3] and give little consideration to whether or not we have arrived. Anglicans are able therefore to live with provisionality; it's not a disgrace to say 'I don't know' or 'I'm a bit of an agnostic on that one', and we're fond of quoting Father Raymond Raynes[4] who, when asked by an earnest evangelist 'Are you saved?', replied, 'I'm damned if I know.' More than being quick-witted, this was good Anglican theology.

Whether it's pushing back the frontiers of theological debate, thinking the unthinkable about who Jesus really was, ordaining women to the priesthood and episcopate, authorizing the village 'headman' to preside at the Eucharist, planting new churches in pubs on housing estates, pioneering designer-worship for our alienated young people, rethinking what 'church' means in a post-Christian culture ... in all these areas Anglicans have been in the forefront of change. Newman may have been misguided when he left home, but he was dead right when he said, 'To grow is to change, and to become perfect is to have changed often.'

Because we are free to think for ourselves, because we are confident enough to take risks, because we are unencumbered with a weighty magisterium, and yet also because we feel secure in the sacred tradition that is ours, we are able to sally forth into the unknown to seize hold of truth. Bishop John Robinson[5] wrote that we need never be afraid of the truth, wherever it leads us, and in so saying he distilled the essence of Anglicanism. We are people on the move, emerging from a safe position to take hold of life with quiet, unassuming confidence. This indeed is the hope God has set before us.

5

From Chains to CD Rom

The Anglican Approach to Scripture

If we make a start with the Bible, the typical characteristics of the Anglican approach will soon come into play, for we approach Scripture in the same way that we approach many other things in the Christian life – with reverence and with affection, but without working ourselves up into a lather about it.

The Bible, Holy Scripture, the story of God's activity in history, has a central place in the Anglican way of life, from medieval times when the Bible was chained up in the parish church (far too dangeorus a document to fall into the hands of the laity!), until today, when you can summon up instant Holy Writ on your pocket computer.

The Bible is really a library of books rather than a single book, consisting of twenty-seven early documents preserved from the first Christian communities (the 'New Testament'), preceded by thirty-nine books making up the Hebrew Scriptures (the 'Old Testament') known to Jesus himself. The selection of books to be kept in this particular library was the responsibility of the religious authorities of the time. The Church took until the late fourth century to agree which books were in and which were out, while leaders of the Jewish community did a similar job on the Hebrew Scriptures, finally discarding the additional books approved by Greek-speaking Jews (you will find these in some Bibles listed under the heading 'The Apocrypha' in a kind of

no-man's-land between Old and New Testaments). So the revelation of God in Scripture is process as well as event.

The story of how the Bible ended up in the size and shape it is now is one very good reason why Anglicans come to value common sense as one of the highest virtues of the spiritual life. We have learnt over the centuries to apply bucketfuls of salt to many of the things we've been told by religious fanatics, with the result that while it's fair to say we Anglicans honour Scripture, reverence it and delight in it, we fall short of worshipping it.

In fact we treat it with caution, because, like dynamite, it can blow up in our faces. Just when we're beginning to enjoy ourselves with the Bible, getting to the point of scriptural agility, tossing texts about like a juggler spinning plates on sticks, we recall the warning of Jesus against people who love texts and have their noses buried in a holy book: 'You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life ... yet you refuse to come to me to have life' (John 5:39–40). Of course Jesus here was referring to the Jewish scriptures he knew and revered from boyhood, but nevertheless the warning stands. As Anglicans see it, Christians are a people richly blessed with a priceless collection of Holy Scriptures, but they are people *with* a book, not *of* a book. Anglicans are uneasy with the notion of scriptural inerrancy, for there is more to our experience of God than even the Scriptures can encapsulate and convey. God always evades our best efforts to contain him, and the thought that we could ever box God in between the covers of a book is to be resisted. Our God is bigger than that.

But the Bible is indeed God's 'Holy Word'. It is the message of God to his people, gathered and set down by the human agency of those who over thousands of years have waited on the Lord in fear and trembling and excitement. Through their faithfulness, the individual believer now has in the Scriptures immediate and direct access to the mysteries of God.

As always, however, it is the middleman who gets in the way and takes too much of a cut. No one is capable of serving as a faultless audio-typist to God. Every human agent who through the centuries has played a part in setting down what we now call 'Holy Scripture', has had an angle, an agenda, a prejudice, or simply a failing of some kind, which has to some extent muddied the clear waters of the original revelation.

When we first sit down to read the Bible, perhaps with the fresh enthusiasm of a new believer, we may begin by imagining that God somehow arranged for his words to be miraculously transferred to the inscribed papyrus or printed page, as if by some celestial fax machine. The reality is more like a message being shouted across a busy road at the rush hour; traffic noise gets in the way and every now and then we miss a vital word. Those of us gathered on this side of the road look to each other hopefully and do our best to agree the gist of what was being communicated, but when we compare notes we find our individual versions don't exactly coincide.

So alongside the glory and the beauty and the drama of Holy Scripture, we have too the muddle and the mistakes that typify any joint enterprise between God and humankind.

I remember, as a keen young university student, joining a group of over-earnest Christians in a Gateshead vicarage one Sunday afternoon (I must have been *very* keen), to sit at the feet of a rather fierce fundamentalist – a parish priest who believed in God's fax machine long before faxes were invented. It wasn't long before he strayed on to the subject of the idolatries associated with the Church of Rome, and I somehow plucked up courage to comment that surely it was just as easy for Protestants to become idolatrous about the Bible as Catholics about the Pope. From that moment I became *persona non grata* in that circle, but perhaps it marked also my Damascus Road experience towards a truly Anglican understanding of Scripture.

It dawned on me in that moment that idolatry lurks at both ends of the ecclesiastical spectrum, and in any shape or form is to be abhorred, or better still kicked into touch with humour. In the final analysis, such total dependence on human contrivances masquerading as spiritual certainties makes a sad spectacle. Anglicans have had to be made of sterner stuff, learning a greater degree of self-sufficiency than is required at the extreme left or right of Christian tradition.

Scripture is holy, but we have to wrestle with it, as Jacob wrestled with God (Gen. 32:24), if it is to yield up its secrets and share with us its holiness. Sometimes the messages of God found in Scripture hurtle themselves at us with bruising directness and efficacy, but equally often they are far from self-evident, and have to be dug out laboriously from long stretches of unrelieved monotony or from puzzling encounters which, at first reading, have no apparent relevance to our own time and place. God is in there, struggling to get out, but to allow him to speak we have to prise apart a few bars, or even open a few doors.

Many new doors and openings have been created over the last 150 years or so by critical biblical scholarship which has sought to crack the code of Scripture which for later generations of believers can so often seem a secret forgotten language. By dissecting and analysing the language and thought-forms and hidden agendas of those servants of God who compiled the Scriptures for us, the essential message of God can be revealed as if for the first time.

This sounds a risky enterprise, and indeed there is much scope for the throwing-out of babies with the bath-water, but it is a process we need to go through if we are ever to grow up. This process is particularly important in the area of Christian evangelization, where we need to squash once and for all the quaint notion that (for example) the first chapters of Genesis are a physics textbook instead of a camp-fire story from a relatively primitive society with amazingly accurate insights into the mystery of God, and into

humankind's relationship with God, present and absent. There is no shortage of barrack room theologians attempting to convict the Church of perpetuating scriptural interpretations it has long ago abandoned (e.g. that the world was made in a week, or that there was an historical character called Adam from whose rib was cobbled together Woman No 1). Sadly all too many Church members appear unsure how to respond to such allegations, and perhaps Anglicans have in the past not been as well informed as members of other Christian traditions.

We need therefore to make sure that we know how to understand and use Scripture in the spiritual battle, so that it is truly a sharp and effective weapon for truth, not a rusty old musket that can blow up in our hands.

The Church must no longer make itself a hostage to fortune by being associated with beliefs made untenable by developments in our scientific knowledge, knowledge which is after all but another means of God's communicating to us the mystery and splendour of his creative force.

Although it has been German-speaking theologians who have led the way in this exploration beyond the boundaries of what was safe and acceptable, it is a journey in which Anglicans instinctively become involved, an involvement entirely in keeping with the history of an island nation which learnt early on that survival lay in exploration far away from the safe harbours of home waters. When it comes to Scripture, Anglicans are most at ease when being thoroughly open about the anomalies evident in the Bible, not trying to pretend (for example) that every letter in the New Testament with Paul's name at the top was necessarily written by him, or that every single word ascribed to Jesus in the four Gospels was necessarily spoken by him. We like to come clean, rather than claiming for ourselves or for Scripture an authority which it is impossible to uphold and which would require us to weave and dive with too-clever-by-half arguments for sustaining the unsustainable.

This approach of fearless exploration is not as shocking or as dangerous as it sounds, but is part of a gradual process in which hypotheses either slowly gain ground, moving from scholarly suggestion to common acceptance, or come to be seen in due course as the peculiar postulations of an unsupported lone voice. Up to less than a hundred years ago, the Letter to the Hebrews, for example, would have gone unchallenged as a product of Paul himself; today no one is left to support such an assertion. Although the Authorized Version of the Bible attributes Hebrews to Paul, and although as recently as the 1950s, commentators as renowned as Ronald Knox clung stubbornly to the official line[1], by the time the Jerusalem Bible appeared in the 1960s the line had collapsed and common sense (which in the case of Hebrews had in fact held sway for the first four centuries) overwhelmed the guardians of 'official truth'.

In fact, you don't have to be a scholar of any kind to see immediately from a first reading of Hebrews that it has about as much in common with the letters of Paul as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* has with a telephone directory. Its language and thought-forms, when compared, let us say, with 1 Corinthians, might as well have come from another planet. Yet such is the resistance to exploratory biblical scholarship in some quarters of the Christian camp that less than fifty years ago black was being called white in the name of orthodox belief. This is not the Anglican way. We are happy for the beans to be spilt just as soon as the can has been opened, knowing that unless we are open about these things we shall be discredited in the eyes of those we most want to reach with the essential good news of Jesus the Christ. The danger is that in dismissing the unsustainable they may dismiss the whole shooting match.

Hebrews is an extreme example because its official accreditation was so obviously unsupportable, but there is growing general acceptance for a whole host of conclusions arising from painstaking scholarship which are opening our eyes to

what was really going on in the early Christian communities that put together what we now know as the 'New Testament'. Among the most well-established examples is the recognition of the last eleven verses of Mark's Gospel as a later additon to give a tidy and happy ending to the original form of the earliest Gospel, because the second and third generations of Christians could not face up to the rawness of Mark's ending on a note of fear and disarray (16:8). When we turn to the writings of Paul, it is now generally accepted that of the thirteen letters attributed to Paul, only seven can be recognized without dispute as authentic (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon).

Throughout the New Testament we can detect signs of that very human tendency to dot i's and cross t's, reading back into earlier events later developments in thought, and claiming apostolic authority for documents compiled later by those understandably concerned for the unity and stability of a volatile Christian community rent by theological disputes and struggles for ecclesiastical power. An example of this tendency is the second letter attributed to Peter. When examined carefully it is seen to contain more than enough evidence to secure a safe conviction of its author on a charge of what we would today call forgery, but what was then seen as fully justified expediency for the common good.[2] If we wish to move a little further towards the frontiers of biblical scholarship, we could take a closer look at the two letters addressed to the Thessalonians, both of which bear Paul's name but only the first of which is now accepted as authentic. The similarities between the two letters in structure and in vocabulary may point not to a common authorship (as was originally thought), nor to a wish by the author of 2 Thessalonians to comment on Paul's first edition, but perhaps even to an attempt to *replace* Paul's work.[3]

Investigating such stories, as well as being great whodunnit fun, is important for us today. We are concerned here not with the arguments for preferring one text as opposed to

another, but with the theological battle for the mind of the newly-emergent Christian Church, and for the mind of the thinking enquirer today. Anglicans believe that by understanding our Scriptures better, we can open the door on to the living Church of the first two centuries, warts and all, when nothing was as clear-cut (not even the pre-eminent position of Paul) as the triumphant Church of later centuries would have us believe, and when everything was up for grabs, even the deepest question of who Jesus really was.

Scripture nevertheless has a pre-eminent place as the body of sacred writings 'containing all things necessary to salvation'. For Anglicans it is placed alongside the three other articles of faith – creed, sacraments and episcopacy – enshrined for us in the Lambeth Quadrilateral (we shall come back to this in the next chapter, on doctrine). Thus Scripture is seen as one of four basic foundation stones underpinning the full and authentic Christian life, but is first among equals, being the supreme source of authority in the determination of faith necessary to salvation. Our medieval forebears who chained up their Bibles were acknowledging that Scripture is a powerful force which can be used or abused, just like any of God's other gifts.[4] Today we reflect contemporary society in preferring completely open access in every conceivable way and with the help of every kind of technological gadgetry.

Anglicans have always been in the forefront of the work of translating the Bible afresh into the language of today. This task was begun by Wycliffe as early as the fourteenth century, and was taken up courageously by Tyndale (who came to a grisly end for his trouble), and Coverdale, and continues to this day with a wide range of modern translations now available to bring alive the timeless word of God.[5] The role of the community of faith as guardians of Scripture is therefore recognized as an unavoidable part of the process if the message of God is to be reinterpreted for each new generation of believers. This role was recognized in Scripture itself in the Ethiopian eunuch's reply to Philip, on being asked

whether he understood the prophecy of Isaiah that he was reading: 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' (Acts 8:31). At the same time we operate as a community under the authority of Scripture. The relationship is mutual; the Church needs the Bible, and the Bible needs the Church.

The fact that our history has witnessed all these stages of biblical understanding gives us Anglicans both a sense of awe and wonder at the voice of God communicated by Holy Scripture, the word that is 'living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit' (Heb. 4:12), and at the same time a sense of joyous excitement as we unpack this priceless gift, knowing that with the unwrapping of each layer we draw closer to the mystery of God himself who is too big and too magnificent ever to be contained between the covers of a single book.

6

Dogmas and Dugouts

The Anglican Approach to Doctrine

When it comes to the formulation of right belief, Anglicans tend not to make waves. We are conscious of being but one shard of the broken vessel which is the Church, and the junior partner in the tripartite family of churches (the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics being the other two) that claim an apostolic succession from the earliest Christian times down to the present day.

This chapter on Anglican doctrine ought to be the shortest in the book for the simple reason that Anglicanism has no doctrines of its own,[1] being content with those inherited from the undivided Church. These basic Christian doctrines are the building blocks of Christianity as a world religion, and concern chiefly the nature of God revealed as Father through Scripture and through history, the person and work of Jesus, the Christ of God, and the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Church's preoccupation with the relationship between these three manifestations of the personal God in history – i.e. these three 'persons' of the Holy Trinity – sometimes suggests to others that we are dodgy monotheists. It is absolutely essential however that we get one thing straight from the start; that for us as for all Christians there is only *one* God – Yahweh, Allah – and we therefore take our rightful place alongside all the other spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham in the Jewish and Islamic traditions.[2]

In matters of doctrine Anglicans attach the greatest importance to operating in accordance with what the Church believed and practised before it was torn apart in the Great Schism of 1054, when Rome and Constantinople finally parted company. We are not interested in developing doctrines of our own, only in being faithful to the common mind of the Church of the first millennium. We strive to reproduce nothing less than that, and certainly nothing more. In determining what the early Church believed and practised, we are therefore guided chiefly by the record of Scripture and by the documents of the General Councils of the undivided Church – the occasional formal gatherings of bishops from the four corners of the known world to deliberate on matters of doctrine and to settle disputed theological questions.

An example of a document emanating from a General Council which became a primary source of authority in doctrinal matters is the profession of faith we now know as the Nicene Creed. This important summary of the basic Christian doctrines was approved by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but possibly dates back to the Council of Constantinople in 381. This creed has been recited at eucharistic worship in both East and West ever since, and is a good example of a document which is all the more significant for having been forged in the furnace of theological controversy, every sentence and phrase representing a hard-won victory for what came to be recognized as mainstream Christian belief.

The nearest thing we have to a 'foundation document' is the Lambeth Quadrilateral (or more accurately the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral), which began life at the 1886 Chicago Convention of United States Anglicans and crossed the Atlantic two years later to be formally adopted by all the Anglican bishops meeting at Lambeth. These four Articles of Faith were seen as a good recapitulation of the essential foundations on which Anglicans stood and which helped define their unique place in the Christian family as a church both

Catholic and Reformed. The four Articles, enshrining the inherent balance characteristic of Anglicanism, have proved themselves to be an invaluable benchmark in determining doctrinal questions from an Anglican point of view. They are:

- Holy Scripture as 'the rule and ultimate standard of faith'
- the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds as 'sufficient statement of the Christian Faith'
- the two sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist
- the historic episcopate.

Although divided from the Orthodox Churches by more miles and by a more distinctly different culture than is the case with Rome, it is interesting to note that when we come to doctrinal *instincts*, we find ourselves more at home with the Church of the East (centred originally on Constantinople, modern-day Istanbul) than with the Church of the West (centred on Rome).

When faced with an impenetrable mystery of God, the instinct of the East is to bow down and worship, the instinct of the West is to reach for a microscope and attempt to analyse what is going on. To take the Eucharist as one example, all three traditions hold firmly to the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ – that in the Church's breaking of bread we can encounter Jesus as objective reality not dependent on subjective feeling – but only Rome seeks to *explain* it. The doctrine of transubstantiation, perfected by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, represents the Western tendency to take the petals off the flower in order to understand its beauty. In contrast, the Orthodox are content to approach the Eucharist as an unfathomable mystery of God which it is futile to try to explain further. This instinct is echoed in the Anglican approach to this central act of Christian worship, which Elizabeth I summed up better than anyone before or since:

'Twas God the word that spake it,
He took the bread and brake it;
And what the word did make it;
That I believe and take it.[3]

The 1662 Book of Common Prayer, although long past its sell-by date as a source of liturgical practice for today, remains significant because it has for so long enshrined Anglican doctrinal instincts and continues to do so, supplemented by *The Alternative Service Book 1980*. The old adage *lex orandi, lex credendi* ('what we pray, we believe') accurately affirms that our belief is shaped by our prayer and our practice when we meet together in the assembly of the faithful.

For this reason, the work of the Liturgical Commission today has a significance far beyond the composition of prayers and the shaping of services. Its recent publications such as *The Promise of His Glory* (1991) show how modern liturgy can be creative, stimulating and beautiful, and at the same time formative in contemporary doctrinal understanding. Contemporary liturgy is proving itself a most effective means, for all but the most rabid reactionary, of intergration into a worshipping community where praying and believing are in fruitful conversation.

The deeply held conviction that we should not proceed in doctrinal matters beyond the bounds set by Holy Scripture means that Anglicanism shrinks instinctively from new dogmatic definitions which have no basis in Scripture and little or no corroboration from the Church of the first Christian centuries.

For Anglicans, Scripture has a pre-eminent place as the body of sacred writings 'containing all things necessary to salvation', and it is Scripture that is the overriding formative influence when it comes to matters of Christian doctrine. For this reason Canterbury parts company with Rome when it comes to the fundamental question of the definition of essential Christian beliefs. While the Roman Catholic Church feels justified in adding to the original corpus of Christian

doctrines other doctrines not found in Scripture but developed by the Church over the centuries,[4] such a move into areas of belief devoid of clear scriptural warranty remains alien to the Anglican character. While it is permissible for individual Anglicans to hold such views as personal pious opinions, the adoption of such dogmas as life-and-death doctrinal matters would appear both unnecessary and harmful. Furthermore, the Anglican view would be that no single fragment of the divided Church (albeit the largest fragment) has the authority to 'declare UDI' in matters of doctrine.[5]

At the same time, Anglicanism does not shrink from radical change whenever it receives a heavy hint from the Holy Spirit, for it has always accepted that in doctrinal matters a process of evolution is going on as the Church unpacks the glorious gifts of God, peeling away the wrapping paper of the previous centuries.

This evolutionary process was very much in evidence in the development of Cranmer's eucharistic theology, for example, and in our own day can be seen in the decision to push ahead with the admission of women to the ordained priesthood in advance of the Roman and Orthodox Communions. Following the example set by other provinces and dioceses of the Anglican Communion (Hong Kong 1971, Canada 1976 and the USA 1977), the Church of England ordained its first women priests in 1994, and women have now been admitted to the episcopate in the USA and New Zealand. Although conservatives view this development with alarm, wary of such an abrupt departure from Catholic tradition, it is generally agreed that Catholic doctrine remains unimpaired. If the progressives (both Roman and Anglican) are to be believed, then it is quite inevitable that in due course the ordination of women to the priesthood will become possible throughout the whole of the Catholic Church. Protestations of 'impossibility' are not to be taken too seriously; in the seventeenth century the Roman Church said as much about the findings of Copernicus and Galileo.

With a bit of luck the Anglican Communion may therefore end up looking prophetic. Of course, being us, we didn't *mean* to be prophetic, we just did it, some of us for all the wrong reasons, and some of us with great reluctance. It would be nice however if, when the history books come to be written, Anglicans came up smelling of roses, just for once.

The fact that the Church of England sets such great store by the doctrine of the undivided Church does not mean that doctrinal questions in today's Church are a dead duck. In England, we have a Doctrine Commission to keep us on track, advising the bishops on doctrinal questions of current concern, and producing reports on thorny issues. Much of its work involves the translation of the theological language and thought-forms of the first centuries into concepts that stand a chance of being understood in today's culture.[6]

More important than the work of any commission, however, is the very air we Anglicans breathe. Anglicanism's most precious possession, and perhaps its most distinctive mark, is its creation of a church environment in which enquiry and exploration can thrive.[7] Being relatively decentralized, we have no awesome machinery for suppressing theological speculation or hounding the theologian who lives on the edge. We are free. We seek, not conformity to intellectual strait-jackets imposed by yesterday's Church, but the truth.[8]

In his *Pursuit of the Ideal*, the late Isaiah Berlin wrote 'those who rest on comfortable beds of dogma are victims of forms of self-induced myopia, blinkers that may make for contentment, but not for understanding of what it is to be human'. He was writing there of the futility of the human search for any perfect solution, any complete answer, but in so doing unwittingly gave expression to a very Anglican approach to dogmatic theology.

'What are certainties for others, for you are merely hints, indications, outlines.' The great spiritual director Abbé Huvelin of St Augustin, Paris, wrote these words to Baron

Von Hugel at the turn of the nineteenth century, but he might even more appropriately have been addressing his kindred spirits in the Anglican Communion. He went on, 'The living truth flees definitions in every direction ... The Scholastics do not understand that life, all life, escapes analysis. What they dissect is the dead body ... Pass them by, with a gentle, very gentle, smile; pass them by.'[9] Our sentiments entirely.

This is no new phenomenon. The great fifth-century battle between the rigid, unyielding dogmatism of Augustine and the experiential, common sense approach of Pelagius resulted in a predictable victory for Goliath, and the Church has had to try ever since to live with Augustine's 'savage affirmation of predestination'[10] and his preoccupation with the worthlessness of humankind. The Pelagian concept of human partnership with God and the vital role of free choice have been tut-tutted against ever since. Not just because we tend to back the underdog, but also because we have a deep distrust of massive, water-tight systems which allow no room for individual manoeuvre, we Anglicans tend to remain uneasy about Pelagius' confinement in the sin-bin, while Augustine's obsessions continue to ricochet around the Church unchallenged.

To dig itself deep into defensible dogmatic dugouts is not therefore the Anglican way. It prefers a more relaxed approach. This can be difficult to live with at times, but occasional pain and frustration is a price worth paying for the glorious privilege of a life in a sacred community where fear and intimidation are unknown concepts. Because of this freedom we enjoy a real sense both of receiving doctrine from the past, and of participating together in the ceaseless process of reinterpreting and renewing it for the future.

7

Us and Me

The Anglican Approach to the Church

The London Underground can be a frightening place – not so much for getting mugged in, but for overhearing conversations which are the stuff of ecclesiastical nightmares.

One conversation I overheard recently involved a middle-aged man stringing off to his companion a list of all the churches he had belonged to over the last thirty years in different parts of the world ... an Anglican one here, a Baptist there, a Pentecostal over here. He had in fact reverted to Anglicanism in the end, but I doubt that he was much of a catch. He was a product of our times, of the consumer generation which proclaims the gospel of picking and choosing to suit our own needs, soft-peddling brand loyalty.

Significantly, experience of Roman Catholicism was missing from his list, indicating an evangelical allegiance, and this highlights for us the spectrum of widely differing attitudes to the Church. We might call this the spectrum of ecclesiology, at one end of which is 'me' and at the other is 'us'. Our friend on the train would have been at the far left, the 'me' end of the spectrum, concerned chiefly with the individual's relationship with God, whereas the practising Roman Catholic or Orthodox would be at the far right, the 'us' end of the spectrum, concerned chiefly with the incorporation of the individual into the corporate life of the Body of Christ.

It won't come as a big surprise to know that Anglicanism maintains a steady middle position in this spectrum, holding

the balance between the individual and the corporate aspects of life in the Church. The Church can be built only from living stones, i.e. from individual men and women who know their need of God, with whom they have entered a personal relationship. That being said, the Church is a great deal more than the sum of its individual members, and when energized by the Spirit, it takes on a life of its own. The living Church is truly a mystery of God, and becomes as it were a person in its own right, with its own demands on our time and on our loyalty.

Once again, as with Scripture, we see in the Anglican approach to the Church that characteristic combination of reverence and affection tempered by common sense and a refusal to take too seriously the assertions of the partisan. It doesn't escape our attention that those Christian churches most convinced of the divine authority of their magisterium are precisely the churches most likely to exalt man-made rules into God-given commandments. Such observations confirm us in our preference for a more relaxed approach, a less exalted notion of our own importance in the economy of God.

The word 'church' has been much abused over the centuries. Originally meaning the assembly of the faithful, it has been gradually debased so as to come to mean the building in which the assembly meets. It is the latter definition that takes preference in the dictionaries and in common use. We talk glibly of 'going to church' when all the time the wonder of God's design is that we are called to *be* church. Once we recall the dynamic rather than the static meaning of the word, we begin to glimpse the many-layered meanings of 'church' for us today.

Most commonly, 'church' is the symbol of our allegiance, the word used to describe the local Christian community where we encounter God and which is the focus of our activity and endeavours as Christians. Interestingly, the application of this word continually widens, and is now

most frequently used for the regular assembly of believers, irrespective of their ecclesiology or background. Whereas as recently as fifty years ago, local communities would have been divided in Christian allegiance between 'church' and 'chapel', such distinctions have now all but completely died out; 'church' is a word everyone is happy with, and no longer carries overtones of any particular theology or ecclesiology.

'Church' in the localized sense means our Nazareth: the one-horse town, full of misfits, clowns and the walking wounded, of which we are part. Here God has chosen to place us so that we can give him glory and help to establish his Kingdom. Such particular and localized allegiance is an inescapable part of our growing up into God. Without our thirty years in Nazareth we shall never be equipped to do our three years' active service.

This is why it is so important for us to become part of a church and to stick with it. Not because our church is better than yours, but simply because every single local church, big or small, good, bad or indifferent, is able to be for us God's hot-house, where we, his prize plants, can be nurtured and brought to maturity. Such nurture is, however, not always a case of basking in warm sunshine; a hot-house is a place of forcing growth when our natural inclination is to stagnate. The local church is a place where we have the corners knocked off us, and come face to face with the variable and unreliable quality of the raw material (i.e. you and me) that God has at his disposal. It can be an exhausting and bruising process, but then so is winning the Cup Final or climbing K2. Because Anglican communities of faith tend to be small to medium in size, you may feel very exposed, soon noticed if you are present, but immediately missed if you're not. You will be entering a real community, not conducive to anonymity, and the writing is on the wall for those who, in their anxiety to avoid participation, will lurk behind pillars, sit in the back row, or confine themselves to 8 o'clock Communion.

In England, your local church will serve a parish, a chunk of territory defined precisely in geographical terms, which serves to give us an added dimension to the Nazareth experience. It is not only your fellow-worshippers that you are lumbered with, but also the whole population of men, women and children – irrespective of religious affiliation – who live within the parish boundaries.

The church with a small 'c', the 'local branch', is symbolized by the parish church, the building down our road with a sticky-up spire and pointed windows. This is 'home' to the local Christian community who will have to work hard to stand still, propping up the equivalent of a small stately home on whatever they can scrape together from their own resources, there being no outside help from state or diocese to stop the building leaking or falling down. You will find Anglican congregations proud of their buildings, and rightly so, for the parish churches of England are the jewels of the nation's crown, but their struggles may well make them defensive if threatened with change or upheaval. At this point, take care. It is a short step from natural pride to blind idolatry, and every congregation needs to ask the question, 'Do we own the building, or does the building own us?' In the most extreme cases, the crusade to polish and preserve can crowd out all other considerations, and here you will find the local 'ambassadors of Christ' a very grumpy lot indeed, uninterested in anyone outside their closed circle. Avoid them like the plague.

Just to make it really interesting, the parish church in England is 'home', in a quite different way, to all the people who stay away from it. Local inhabitants who claim even the vaguest Christian label, irrespective of tradition, will all have a proprietary interest in this building which they consider in some mysterious way to be 'theirs'; a place to have recourse to as the need arises irrespective of Christian belief and practice. Here parish churches are like branch railway lines; too few use them until closure or curtailment of services is

threatened. Thereupon the whole community is awash with posters and car-stickers, and you can't emerge from your front door without falling over a woman with a clip-board asking you to sign a petition. This is the church: the local corner shop, God's post office in our street.

Under the direction of its parish priest, every parish church has an apostolic commission to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the people God has put in their patch. This is a great privilege, which other Christian traditions in England would give their right arm for in terms of evangelistic opportunity.

As things stand, you've chosen a good moment to think of enlisting, as you've arrived just in time to take part in the revolution. In the bad old days (i.e. up to today), the local church meant the parish priest ('vicar' is a terrible word nowadays redolent of limp wrists and cucumber sandwiches) supported to a larger or lesser extent by a small band of helpers. The cataclysmic changes in the culture around us – which evidence spiritual hunger coupled with a distaste for the church's regular menu – demand a radical rethink of what 'church' means now.[1] This will involve the mobilization of the whole community of faith, with the ordained leader accepting a rewritten job description as trainer and enabler rather than a one-man worship and mission team. The priest's primary role is to be a holy man or woman of God, recalling us to our full potential – corporately as the holy community of faith, and individually as human beings for whom humanity is redefined by Jesus. The priest conducts the orchestra, and does so most effectively when not attempting to play every instrument.

Anglicans are not congregationalists however. Although life in the local church is make or break time for every Anglican, the place where we must pound the beat before going on to more exciting things, we are conscious of belonging to the wider Church, at diocesan and national level.

The diocese is the area of the Church's life under the authority of a diocesan bishop, and in England we have forty-four of them. In the diocese each parish is reminded that it is merely an individual in a bigger community, and diocesan events are occasions when we celebrate this larger dimension to our Christian lives, and whoop it up a bit. Ordinations and confirmations are examples of significant events centralized at diocesan level, and presided over by our bishop or 'father in God' as an essential reminder that no parish is an island. The cathedral (so called because it houses the chair or *cathedra* of the bishop) is the symbolic 'base camp' of diocesan life, our mother church, and a big cathedral 'do' has a real sense of occasion about it for us backwoodsmen. The fact that you can never park a car within a mile of one, and that they are sometimes both stuffy and over-stuffed with furniture that gets in the way, does however mean that for really big occasions you are as likely to find yourself in the local football stadium as the cathedral – a thoroughly healthy development.

The perception and understanding of the Church at national level will vary from person to person. Some will see it as a religious body that will be there for us when we as a nation no longer know what to do or to say. At the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997, it was as if Westminster Abbey became home for all of us – whatever our creed, colour or nationality, and whether we were packed inside it, or sitting on the grass in Hyde Park, or tuning in a TV set at the other end of the country or across the world.[2]

Others will see it in administrative terms, as a legislative body (in England the General Synod centred on Church House, Westminster); or as the organization which produces an archbishop to appear on the news when the nation's nerve needs steadying; or (this one for the clergy) the bureaucracy who keep the show on the road and send out the salary cheques every month.

In England, Anglicans find themselves the Established Church, the only church of the Anglican Communion so fettered. The Church of England is part of the fabric of society with legal safeguards protecting its public role and allowing the State a voice in the ordering of the Church's affairs. Although establishment confers little more than twenty-four seats for bishops in the upper house of parliament, and a prominent role in ceremonial occasions, it is seen by the more optimistic among us as providing invaluable opportunities for a quiet unobtrusive influence for good. Others of our number see it instead as an embarrassing anachronism tending to emasculate the Church in the exercise of its spiritual and apostolic commission.

Perhaps the most depressing aspect of this debate is that there is hardly any debate at all; the status quo seems to be accepted with surprising passivity, and any talk of bringing the arrangement to an end centres on the secularization of government, rather than the coming-of-age of the Church.

Certainly we in England can be excused looking enviously at those parts of the Anglican Communion such as the Episcopal Church in the United States, where the proscription of religion in government and education seems to have invigorated the life of the local church in a way no longer conceivable in England or northern Europe generally. Perhaps, after all, we in England backed the wrong horse.

Be that as it may, the relationship of the Church with the people, the nation, and the State is now changing and developing. In an age of increasing marginalization for all the churches, the Church of England probably retains a voice and an authority out of proportion to its actual strength. It is still possible to feel a sense of justifiable pride at belonging to such a venerable and apparently indestructible institution which, whenever it is called upon to stage some religious ceremony on behalf of the wider community, does things so incomparably well.

The Church in England also now enjoys a greater degree of freedom in the ordering of its own affairs than it has done since the Reformation period, and we must keep up the momentum in this respect, breaking free from the last vestiges of the State control which was such a heavy price to pay for the reforms of the sixteenth century. It would be good if this could be achieved with a little dignity, from positive conviction rather than by default. If the Church of England is indeed a kept woman, as many would claim, then she needs to find the courage to walk away from the situation before being thrown out on the street.

We should not imagine that problems in the relationship between Church and State are confined to the post Reformation period. In the twelfth century, relations between Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury and King Henry II grew so acrimonious that Becket spent six of his eight years as Primate in exile in France although his subsequent martyrdom ensured eternal celebrity status for him and humiliation for the king. Four hundred years later, Becket's successor, Thomas Cranmer, had no concept of Church as an authority independent of the anointed king, and rushed to fill the power vacuum left by the papacy with a new definition of monarchy as a spiritual force.[3] So enraged was Henry VIII at the very thought of Becket the king-tamer, that he had Becket's magnificent shrine in Canterbury Cathedral torn down and destroyed.[4]

The resilience of the Church of England under Archbishop Robert Runcie (1980–91) in recalling the nation, in the face of a hostile government, to the concept of a truly Christian society, did something to redress the balance of spiritual power. The establishment of the Church Urban Fund to reach out in compassion to those in our inner cities, and the challenging of the notion of the Falklands conflict as a triumphal crusade, tweaked the State's tail, and did much to restore our self-confidence. We no longer felt the need to apologize so energetically for Cranmer's cravenness before

secular authority; perhaps we can rehabilitate Becket in due course (or even restore his shrine as a project for the new millennium?)

At the time of writing, the Church is just coming in from the cold after a long period of being despised by those with political power, and being told to shut up and kneel down. It remains to be seen how it fares in a more favourable climate, whether it lets things go to its head, or whether it manages to become a major influence for change towards a society which is at the same time both more human and more God-centred.

Over and above the local and national definitions of what 'the church' means to us is that dimension bigger than all our human definitions and earthly arrangements; the real McCoy, or as the Nicene Creed puts it, 'the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church'. At this level the Church stands between heaven and earth, combining aspects which are both here-and-now and beyond time and space.

Throughout Christian history, fragments of the broken Church have from time to time attempted to claim for themselves the totality of what it means to be *the* one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. After the Great Schism of 1054, the resultant two churches centered on Constantinople and Rome each maintained that it alone was the one true Church and that the other was in schism. Each church excommunicated the other, Rome becoming a breakaway sect in the eyes of Constantinople, and vice versa. Although in 1965 these mutual excommunications were quashed, the two sides are not really very much further forward, each remaining decidedly snooty about the other. This is rather reassuring for us Anglicans about whom simply everybody is snooty most of the time.

More seriously, the posturings of the ancient churches of East and West, claiming absolute and exclusive authority and getting tangled up in the unseemly business of mutual denunciation, have provided conclusive proof that it is futile for any one part of the Church to claim to exercise the authority

pertaining only to the whole. Such claims begin to look a little ridiculous once we stand back and take stock of such assertions in the context of Christian history. The Anglican view is that since the end of the undivided Church, no single fragment of it (no matter how large its membership or magnificent its structure) can make exclusive claims about authenticity. Since the Great Schism, *every* church is to some extent in schism, for we have all erred in breaking unity with one another. Faced with portentous claims from any quarter, the Anglican response is to blow a (very gentle, almost inaudible) raspberry, knowing how dangerous to the soul is pomposity and self-delusion.

One sign that we are entering healthier times is the growing use of the word 'church', by Christians of every conceivable background (including those for whom previously it remained an empty concept), to refer to the physical reality of the whole Christian community across the world. Whenever we do so, we speak prophetically, making real the reunited Church which as yet remains beyond the reach of ecclesiastical diplomacy.

Whereas top-level talks about Church reunion continue to flounder, undermined by institutional stubbornness and fear, the most promising signs of hope are the quiet but continuous acts of loving and thoughtful rebellion at grassroots level, in which individual Christians refuse to allow man-made regulations to prevent their living out the Christian life with integrity and courtesy.[5] In this way, good manners and basic common sense will prove to be gifts of God as holy as Scripture and tradition.

Full intercommunion will never rain down upon us from above; it will bubble up from below, an unstoppable spring 'welling up to eternal life'. The delay in rebuilding the undivided Church has much to do with this vexed question of admission to the sacred meals celebrated by different parts of the one Church. Each of the mainstream traditions has tended to guard its table jealously, ring-fencing it with a list of

necessary qualifications to restrict participation to its own membership and perhaps a few friends of the family on special occasions. If we stop to recall that the one most outrageous and shocking act of Jesus of Nazareth was to eat with the untouchables and riff-raff of society, then perhaps all Christian Churches will begin to see that if we are to honour this prophetic tradition of our master, then the Eucharist is the very last place to exercise discrimination and exclusion. Here at least Anglicans have played a vital role in keeping the door ajar and the table laid.

Before the mystery of the one holy, undivided community which the Church is called to be, our own needs, demands, rights or desires are seen in true perspective. As we mature in our faith, perhaps we are enabled to shuffle along a few paces, from the 'me' towards the 'us' end of the spectrum, while remembering of course (like the good Anglicans we are) that the Church needs lots of little 'me's' to make an 'us'.

8

Bouquets and Bandages

The Anglican Approach to the Sacraments

Sacraments are funny things, and it takes an Anglican to work them out. They are the sharp points of God's love for us – the places where he actually touches us, prods us with the end of his finger – and a sense of balance is required to walk the tightrope between mere symbolism on the one hand and the confusion of sign and signified on the other. Needless to say, if there's one thing we Anglicans know about, it's balancing.

The old Prayer Book Catechism (revised 1961) defines a sacrament as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace'; but it is more than a sign, because a sacrament is also 'a means whereby we receive the same'. In other words, a sacrament is one of those signs that is so powerful that it brings about that which it signifies. If that sounds awfully like philosophical word-play, then let's get really down to earth with the parallel of sexual intercourse within marriage. Sexual union is a sign and symbol of marriage, but is far more than that, for it consummates the marriage, making it full and real.

In the sacrament of baptism, the believer undergoes a ritual washing (albeit usually in attenuated form) which is the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace of a new life lived in the Spirit which is entered via the individual's symbolic death and resurrection. This is most clearly expressed in baptism by immersion, when the candidate 'dies'

in submersion beneath the surface of the water, before rising from the water to breathe deeply of the fresh air of the community of faith, oxygenated by the Spirit of God. It is this sacrament which delineates the Christian community, the community of the baptized, the holy people of God.

In the sacrament of the Eucharist, the believer participates in the outward and visible sign of a sacred meal, consuming merely a fragment of bread and a tiny sip of wine, but entering thereby into the inward and spiritual reality of a feast which looks back to those meals of Jesus with his friends in Galilee and forward to the glorious wedding reception which is the consummation of the marriage between the Christ and his faithful people.

When we come to speak of sacraments, however, before getting carried away in devotional bliss we must do some serious penance, for in this area of its life the Christian Church must hang its head in shame. Here was one of God's very best ideas thrown back in his face. Sacraments are little presents from God, lovingly gift-wrapped in beautiful packages (refreshing water, warm bread, soothing aromatic oil) and generously provided both to encourage us at vital navigation points on our journey, and to sustain us for the regular foot-slogging of daily life. Nothing could be simpler. It seems, however, that God had not foreseen the infinite capacity of humankind to abuse the best things of creation. Nowhere is this more true than in relation to the Eucharist, of all the sacraments the one in which we encounter God most frequently.

Jesus was the wild prophet who overturned tables, both literally (in the Temple precincts) and figuratively (in his abandonment of Jewish ritual exclusivity). Jesus inaugurated the open table as the most powerful sign he could imagine of the coming Kingdom of God.[1] The open, unconditional invitation to eat at the table of Jesus was a potent symbol of the new kind of society he sought to create. The open table was also deeply subversive to religious authority, and the Christian Church (no more than the Jewish hierarchy of

Jesus' day) has never been able to cope with it. To think that for many centuries Christians murdered one another, and subjected one another to excruciating torture, all for the sake of the precise definition of what exactly was happening when the Church broke bread and blessed wine, is nothing less than obscene. Here was the Church hurling back at God his sign of unconditional love, setting at nought the sacrifice of the Christ, and making null and void this central and pre-eminent tenet of his teaching. In those dark days the Church turned the gospel on its head, and though we may recoil in horror, there are few of us completely free of those same prejudices that wrought such havoc in the past.

As good Anglicans, therefore, mindful of the blood spilt on English soil in the pursuit of theological correctness, we must approach the sacraments with a renewed reverence at the wonder of God's lavish provision, and a renewed determination to keep our grubby little hands from dirtying what is given to us pure and undefiled.

First of all we should refuse to play the numbers game. There are commonly said to be two sacraments – Baptism and the Eucharist – which Jesus indisputably set in motion himself. In addition there are five others – penance, anointing of the sick, confirmation, marriage and ordination – which those of the Catholic tradition are careful to include, albeit as 'lesser' sacraments.

The truth is not likely to be that simple or that neat and tidy. In the first place, the distinction between 'dominical' (those instituted by the Lord) and 'lesser' sacraments seems arbitrary. Taking the Gospel passages at their face value, penance has just as good a claim as baptism (perhaps more so) to be an authentic 'dominical sacrament', some method by which Christians are to be reassured of God's forgiveness through the ministry of the Church being clearly seen to form part of Jesus' intentions at least in the Fourth Gospel (John 20:23). When we take a look at the Reformation period, we see that the Ten Articles of 1536 (two years after the break with Rome) was emphatic in asserting that

auricular confession was 'instituted of Christ', and the Bishops' Book of 1537 maintained the special character of these three major sacraments as distinct from the four lesser ones which had only tradition to support them. This was the Lutheran view, and it was only later, when more Calvinist influences gained the upper hand, and the Reformers grew more jittery about priestly power, that the number of major sacraments was altered to two, politics taking precedence over biblical exegesis.

Sacramental confession therefore has always been a vital part of Anglican spiritual life, albeit in a characteristically open way – no boxes or curtains for us, thank you. It is encouraged, rather than enforced and penitents do not confess *to* a priest, but *alongside* a priest to God, whose forgiveness needs to be made personal if we are ever to be healed of our self-inflicted wounds. Today, increasing numbers of Christians in all traditions are discovering the healing power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as Penance is now usually called.

When it comes to baptism, we might want to examine more closely the texts at the end of Mark's and Matthew's Gospels which exhort the Church to 'get baptizing!' In the case of Mark it is almost certainly a later addition, and these postscripts may reflect not so much the priorities of Jesus himself (who showed a marked lack of interest in baptism throughout his ministry) as the early Church's concern to establish and authenticate proper procedures for initiation into the Christian community.

In the second place, we should be wary of limiting God's sacramental grace. While it is important not to devalue the currency by labelling as a sacrament every conceivable encounter with God in which the physical is used to communicate the spiritual, nevertheless in our instinctive approach to sacraments we should be shouting 'not seven, but seventy times seven!' (Matt. 18:22).

In establishing its original list of seven sacraments the Church was obviously seeking to mark various key points in

our life story with solemn rites and ceremonies in which the ministry of the Church could bring the blessing of God to bear on those moments when we seek to renew our covenant with God. Baptism, confirmation, ordination, and marriage are examples of 'key stage' sacraments, to be experienced once only, while penance, anointing and Eucharist are designed to keep us on the road, and to be experienced over and over again. In the 'key stage' sacraments the Church picked out just four moments for hallowing in this way, but we can imagine many more events suitable for extending this principle (e.g. commissioning various forms of lay ministry, or the blessing of an individual or family before they emigrate or move to another part of the country).

A sacrament is always a communal event with a vital social dimension, celebrated by or on behalf of the community of faith. Even where the participants are limited in number (e.g. in the sacrament of penance) the community is nevertheless an unseen partner in the deal, for it is for the community's sake (as well as the penitent's) that the sacrament was given, that by reconciliation and healing, the Body of Christ might be built up and made strong. Where the Christian community prays over individuals or groups in these circumstances, laying hands upon them and anointing them with holy oil, or blessing them with water from the baptismal font, then we can safely say that a sacramental act has taken place, or even that a new sacrament has been born. Another sacrament is like another saint; we can't have too many of them.

We are in good company if we refuse to restrict God's grace in this way. The classification of the sacraments was but another typical example of the tidy little mind of the Western Church which wanted to have everything neatly tied up into bundles, each with its own label. The classification of the sacraments wasn't even attempted for the first five hundred years (when all kinds of occasions were included such as funerals and the taking of monastic vows) and it took until 1439 for a definitive list to be finally approved.

The great thing to remember about a sacrament is this: that God always turns up, even if we are late or don't turn up at all. In other words, a sacrament conveys the *objective* reality of God's love; it is not a question of feelings, or of our subjective perception of what is going on, but of what God is actually *doing*, come what may. In this way, receiving Holy Communion (which will be a real encounter with God no matter which side of the bed we got out of that morning) is a quite different kind of encounter with God than being moved by a word of Scripture or by a particular worship song (which will depend – far too much for our own good – on our own feelings and receptiveness at any one moment).

At the Reformation, the Church of England finally came out against the teaching of people such as the Swiss reformer, Zwingli, who maintained that it is only the communicant's faith that makes Christ present in the Eucharist. We are certain that the sacrament is more than a mere signpost pointing to a distant destination; it is itself a point of arrival, of encounter. Basically keeping company with Luther on this question, Anglican reformers maintained the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (i.e. irrespective of our faith) while denouncing the need to explain that Presence further with philosophical theories such as transubstantiation.[2]

Dangers lurk on every side. When our grasp of the objective reality of a sacrament is weak and wobbly, we might easily slide into casual ways, not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:9), even throwing to the birds the bread left over from the altar, rather than consuming it reverently as our rubrics bid us do, or reserving it in a special place (an aumbry or tabernacle) for the benefit of the sick or those at prayer. Conversely, if our emphasis on objective reality is too literal and circumscribed, we may confuse the sign for the thing signified, mistaking the sacrament of the Lord's presence for the Lord himself, becoming neurotic rather than reverent, burning the best sanctuary carpet should ever a drop be spilt on it from the chalice. That way lies idolatry.

We must also take care to safeguard the nature of sacraments as covenants between God and humankind, rather than as pieces of automatic mechanism dispensing God's grace like water from a tap. An undue emphasis on God's grace to the virtual exclusion of human response is in the end an affront to God's desire to enter into covenant with us. We grow lazy or careless of our own responsibilities in what ought to be a relationship of mutual love where God's grace meets with our willing cooperation and eager participation.

When it comes to the administration of infant baptism, especially in the English situation where there remains considerable social pressure on the Established Church to 'do the business' as and when required, Anglican practice can sometimes be reduced to the unthinking, automated movements of a robot. We too easily hide behind a theology of God's overflowing grace to justify our unwillingness to devote sufficient time and energy to working alongside enquirers, either incorporating them into the life of the Church, or developing for them appropriate rituals[3] which will satisfy their needs without making nonsense of the Church's efforts to reinstate baptism as a meaningful sign of death-and-resurrection and initiation into lifelong commitment within the community of faith.

Despite such operational difficulties, it is the genius of Anglicanism that, in rejecting a sacramental theology of, on the one hand, the automatic soft-drinks machine, and on the other, the private sentimental journey down memory lane, it manages to hold together as perhaps no other tradition can, the complementary aspects of divine initiative and human response.

Anglicanism can reverence the sacraments without mistaking them for the reality to which they point. Anglicans retain a sense of proportion, a deep instinctive understanding that when in solemn assembly we break bread, or pour water or anoint with oil, the Lord makes himself known to us, and we are changed.

9

Decently and in Order

The Anglican Approach to Worship

Worship is what Anglicans know about, and even our worst enemies will grudgingly admit that it's something we do well. The Anglican tradition seems to be gifted with a sixth sense where worship is concerned, and seems able to hit just the right note for the occasion,[1] whether for millions of viewers in Westminster Abbey or for two or three gathered together in an obscure country church. It knows all about dignity in worship, but about celebration too; about when to understate, and when to play the tingle factor for all it's worth.

Our worship is shaped by our history, and so tells us a lot about where we have come from. It is at worship that the Anglican communities are most clearly and immediately recognizable as belonging to the family of Catholic churches, offering the unceasing round of prayer in set forms of daily prayer (the 'Divine Office') and the Eucharist. These are forms of liturgical (as distinct from unstructured) prayer, in which an unchanging given framework is enlivened by variable features – readings, prayers and songs – which reflect the Church's liturgical year and respond to events of the day.

Although we've been at liturgical formation for a very long time, the Church of England put a sudden spurt on during the sixteenth century when it had to make its mind up about whose side it was on in the religious upheaval sweeping Europe. As the attempt to reform the Roman Church from within, beginning with Martin Luther in Germany, proved

unworkable, the new wine burst the old wineskin and the world was agog with new ideas about how Christians should relate to God and to each other.

As a result of this commotion, Sunday worship in the parish church came to perform the function of a TV news programme today – people could 'tune in' to what was happening on the worldwide stage, translated for their benefit into language and images they could understand. They were 'glued to their screens' because they lived in exciting times, witnessing a sea change in the English Church – what the Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng would call a paradigm shift. At the same time, they felt secure: their parish church and their parish priest gave them reassurance amidst upheaval.

The hand and the pen guiding the Church of England through these cataclysmic changes were those of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury 1532–56, whose desire for radical reform was matched by a gift for beautiful language. He longed to give the English people a liturgy through which they might articulate a new directness of approach to God, liberated from the abuses and superstitions of the medieval Church. In all this, Cranmer's task was made easy and impossible at the same time by Henry VIII, the king who had propelled him into the top ecclesiastical job at breakneck speed. The *Via Media* of a Catholic Church in England freed from Roman interference was really Henry's vision, and Cranmer would have achieved little without him. Henry was no mean theologian himself and believed that the Church was far too important a matter to be left to churchmen. For Cranmer, however, devising a new theological and liturgical language for the English Church with Henry breathing down his neck cannot have made for ideal working conditions.

Crucial to the new 'house-style' of the English Church was a new liturgy, so that those making their way to the parish church each Sunday (the vast majority of the population)

would be left in no doubt that times had changed. Both the Eucharist and the Divine Office were made accessible to the people, and more immediate and intimate in their appeal. Eucharist and Office were the weft and warp of the new fabric of worship for the English people. The English Reformers set about with a sense of excitement to peel away the accretions of medievalism to reveal once again the insights of the primitive Church. With the same enthusiasm witnessed in our own generation following Vatican II, the local church found its feet again as a participatory community of faith.

In all this Cranmer master-minded nothing less than a 'turbulent liturgical revolution',[2] an upheaval so great that in some areas of the country it was a contributory factor in civil uprising and bloodshed. It is ironic in the extreme that those who today would defend continued use of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer should associate the name of Cranmer with the perpetuation of antiquated language in worship. Not merely spinning in his grave, he must be going into orbit. Cranmer set himself the task of re-expressing the timeless liturgy of the Church in 'such language as they might understand, and have profit by hearing the same'. He recognized the sterility of clinging to outmoded language (Latin then, and ironically 'Prayer Book language' today) which the faithful 'have heard with their ears only', with the result that 'their heart, spirit, and mind, have not been edified thereby'.[3]

Cranmer enshrined these ideas in a Book of Common Prayer, the first version of which (1549), was updated (in a more Protestant direction) in 1552, and again (in a slightly more Catholic direction) in 1662, revisions which reflected the power struggles of the period in Church and State. Much midnight oil was burned attempting to capture in words and ritual the insights that were taking the Church of England into a new era, and the starting point was the sacred Christian meal, the Eucharist, at which Jesus, the Risen Lord, makes himself known to us in the breaking of the bread.

Although 'Eucharist' may sound obscure and technical, it is simply the Greek for 'thank you', virtually the same word we use today on a Greek holiday when we thank the waiter at the taverna. This thanksgiving meal is the chief act of worship for parishes Sunday by Sunday, as the whole faith community gathers to celebrate its communal life in the Risen Lord. The Church of England is a eucharistic church, which is symptomatic of its essentially Catholic nature although, in company with the Orthodox, its priority is the eucharistic assembly on 'the first day of the week' (Acts 20:7) and also on major festivals and saints' days. In company with the Orthodox, it does not see anything particularly primitive or desirable in an obsessive insistence on a daily celebration of the Eucharist in conditions where it ceases to become an offering of the whole community and is reduced to an act of personal piety by the few.

With the Eucharist we are again indebted to the Reformers like Cranmer who, four centuries before Vatican II, sought to make the Eucharist no longer a 'muttered Mass' behind a screen, but a corporate, participatory act of worship in which all the faithful were to be made conscious of their individual value and significance within the priesthood of the whole community. Not only was the eucharistic liturgy translated into English, but the act of Communion at the heart of the Mass, which had previously been restricted to once a year at Easter, was encouraged weekly.

We can imagine the enthusiasm, in those parishes where the vision was first caught, with which the altar would have been dragged down from the east wall, turned through 90 degrees and set in the midst of the chancel where everyone could literally gather round; the altar of sacrifice, mysterious and distant, became the table of the Lord, set up in the middle of the house of the church. Just like today, we would see then the same sense of excitement amongst the visionaries, and the same cold water administered by those who wanted none of it. Fortunately for us the visionaries

won, though we shouldn't forget the cost, Cranmer and many others paying with their lives.

The Eucharist will be known by many different names in the Anglican tradition, as befits its consistent attempt to do justice to every aspect of this sacred meal of the Church. 'Mass' is the old English word retained as a sub-title by Cranmer in his first Prayer Book, the ancient name familiar to everyone and which gave them a reassuring sense of continuity. In the 1552 version, less conciliatory to old ways, 'Mass' was dropped, and 'Lord's Supper or Holy Communion' (the latter in slightly larger print) were allowed to stand alone, a description retained in the 1662 update. 'Lord's Supper' never caught on, so we are left with 'Holy Communion' in common parlance, a name which fails to do justice to the whole action of the eucharistic offering of praise and thanksgiving. It is greatly to be regretted that the 1980 update (unlike new liturgies in other Anglican provinces such as Wales) perpetuated this lopsided description of the Mass. Although it did manage to insert 'Eucharist' as a first sub-title, it excluded 'Mass' (although in common use and primitively Anglican) while retaining 'Lord's Supper' (which is neither). Ah well, life in the Church of England can't always be joy unconfined.

Today 'Eucharist' is generally accepted as the best option, being a word innocent of party political overtones, recalling us to the early Church, and reminding us of the instinctive attitude of thanksgiving which should irradiate all our worship. Take time to look up *The Shape of the Liturgy* by Gregory Dix, a towering liturgical authority of the Anglican tradition, and himself a Benedictine monk. It's a large tome, so stick to the poetic bits if you are pressed for time, like the paragraph in Chapter 17 which begins 'Was ever another command so obeyed?' and which recounts the wonder of how the command of Jesus to make Eucharist has been faithfully obeyed by all sorts of people in all kinds of situations. It ends with these words: '... week by week and month by month, on

a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of christendom, the pastors have done this just to make the *plebs sancta Dei* – the holy common people of God.'[4]

While it is true that, as with the Office, the initial vision faded for a time and the Eucharist decreased in frequency, especially during the eighteenth century, in the final analysis the Anglican tradition didn't do so badly. There were always those who kept the flame of the vision burning during the dark times (and ironically John Wesley was prime among them, earning the nickname of 'methodist' for his frequent reception of Holy Communion when to do so was considered odd and extreme). It is doubtful whether things were managed better in the rest of the Western Church where the Mass was reduced to a public spectacle in which the faithful were normally excluded from communion.

In any event, within the Church of England, reinforcements were on their way. The Oxford Movement of the nineteenth century, followed by the Parish Communion Movement of the 1930s, ensured that by our own day there are few who would dispute the centrality of the Sunday Eucharist grounded both on Scripture and tradition. In all but the most extreme politically motivated parishes, the Eucharist is the norm for the main gathering of the liturgical assembly, Sunday by Sunday.

Alongside this centrality of the Eucharist, a particular benefit of the Anglican approach to worship has been a renewed emphasis on the Divine Office as the bread and butter of worship for the whole community of faith.

The Divine Office – the recitation of psalms, framed by antiphons and interspersed with readings – was first developed as a means of corporate prayer by Benedict (480–550), the father of monasticism in the Western Church. In time, the Divine Office was regularized into seven separate acts of worship (or 'hours') during the day and one (Mattins) during the night. The singing of the Divine Office was the

trademark of the monastic houses of men and women consecrated to God by sacred vows.

Once again we owe a debt to Cranmer for releasing the Daily Office into the bloodstream of the Church. In the wake of the dissolution of the monastic houses of England in the 1530s, and in answer to the disappointing response to the availability of weekly Communion in the 1550s, it was Cranmer's brainwave to renew this structure of daily prayer by handing over the Divine Office to the whole people of God, simplifying it for popular consumption by cutting down the number of Offices to just two, for morning and evening. What had previously been the preserve of the cloister became the property of every parish church; what had previously been in Latin was now translated into English, and modern English at that.

It was a master-stroke by which the parish churches of England were provided with an invaluable tool for involving ordinary men and women in worship that actually meant something to them. Even the illiterate could for the first time (like the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the first Pentecost) 'hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God' (Acts 2:11). In this way, Cranmer hoped, 'the people might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion'.[5]

The saying together of Morning and Evening Prayer, day in, day out, for the last 450 years, by small groups of faithful Christians has become the real bedrock of Anglican worship. In it the worshipper is united with the whole Church, past and present, in an offering of prayer that is, thanks to the time zones of the world, quite literally a seamless robe of unceasing praise. Although, as with all breathtakingly bold reforms, the flame of the original vision has flickered and faltered at times, nevertheless it has been kept burning, with great faithfulness and devotion.[6]

The work of retranslating Eucharist and Office into contemporary language did not of course cease with the 1662

Prayer Book, although it remained the mainstay of Anglican worship for over 300 years, despite all attempts to revise it. But the drive to make the language of worship intelligible to twentieth-century ears and hearts finally resulted in the publication of *The Alternative Service Book 1980* which, as its name implies, was only ever intended to be used alongside the Book of Common Prayer – and only for a limited period (twenty years initially) while the work of producing a new, permanent prayer book went on. *Common Worship* is now on its way and elements of it, such as the lectionary, the collects and the service of baptism, are already in place. It promises to be very good, but the process of liturgical reform is painstakingly slow as progressives and conservatives are locked in polite conflict over every point of change, a very different approach to that of Cranmer, who brooked no compromise with the traditionalists of his day.

More recently still, *Celebrating Common Prayer*[7] has provided the Church with a rich and varied pattern for the Divine Office. This has been produced in association with the Society of St Francis, an Anglican religious community. Like so many of the very best things that the Church of England does, is at present 'unofficial' in that it was not commissioned by General Synod, yet it is used in literally thousands of churches and homes every day.

In recent decades this historic 'basic kit' of Office and Eucharist has provided the 'secure home background' for all kinds of experiments in worship, and this is wholly desirable.

The church planting movement has shown us the potential of eucharistic worship which is stripped down to its bare bones and celebrated in all kinds of hired premises as a sign of the pilgrim church making its journey alongside the unchurched. This is not only an evangelistic insight (with a dramatically successful track record), but a liberating experience of worship of great joy, simplicity and immediacy, in which the basic components of liturgy are rediscovered.[8]

Today, in the critical missionary situation of the British Isles at the end of the second millennium, much more will be required of us in the risk-taking business. That is why you are likely to stumble across a whole host of non-liturgical forms of worship – from pram services to all-night raves – which it is important to respect for the evangelistic motives that lie behind it. One particular 'Nine O'Clock Service' in Sheffield may have stumbled, but countless more have sprung up all over the country to take its place, for without such bold exploration in worship (remember Cranmer!) we shall perish, and deservedly so.

This is an exciting time to be discovering liturgy, as we begin to loosen up a little after centuries of living in compartments, to allow ourselves to feed from the well-stocked storehouses of other traditions. In this way the boundaries become blurred and our prejudices a little less sharp. Taizé is but one example of this process, a 'Protestant' community with a 'Catholic' style evolving worship with which the whole world feels at home and to which young people, impatient with the stuffiness of the churches, flock in their tens of thousands.

Impatience is something we could do with a little more of in our parishes right now. The treasures of the Anglican storehouse have served to make us liturgically fat and complacent, and as you venture out into the great Anglican unknown, you will need great determination to keep going. Although of course there are glorious exceptions in every diocese, the experience of liturgical worship in the average parish can be abysmal. While the departed glories of the past are still hankered after, the demands of the present are ignored and the challenges of the future derided because they are feared. Time and time again, a handful of elderly people (with the under-sixties forming the crèche) are found to have hijacked the parish church, commandeered the hymn-list and vetoed change, thereby repelling all boarders. The clergy who connive at such tricks, and stand

aside pathetically wringing their hands in mock exasperation, should be given early retirement, no matter what the cost, as a matter of priority in the Church's mission strategy.

Thankfully there are signs that the Spirit is moving and that we are finding the courage to start again, addressing the imbalances of the Reformation era – the suppression of movement, art and imagery in worship, arising from the reformers' own hang-ups with past excesses – and feeling free to use everything that is good and true, no matter how unlikely the source.

The liturgical insights of the present Christian era, insights shared by every tradition in every continent, are those which recall us above all to our community life around the table of the Lord. This is no more a 'whim' than the Reformation was a 'whim'; it is what the Spirit is saying to the churches today. 'The faithful community must be brought to the recognition of itself in liturgy.'[9]

There is no reason at all why in this rediscovered emphasis on the immanent and the communal, we should lose for one moment the sense of mystery and transcendence. It all depends on how much trouble we take, and the Anglican tradition prompts us to take a great deal of trouble. When Anglicans get it right, it is very good indeed; intimate and awe-inspiring, dignified and joyful, structured and with room for spontaneity – a taste of heaven no less.

Above all, the Anglican tradition will give you an experience of worship *in community*: alien to our way of doing things is the vast, impersonal throng, in which one simply goes through the religious motions, chalking up another attendance statistic. With us you will be recognized, and known, welcomed and (after a little while, because we're shy) appreciated, and (eventually, because we're of English stock and slow in coming forward) your particular gifts discerned and made use of. It may take some time, but in the end you will feel as if you've come home.

So don't give up hope, and keep exploring. Find out what's going on and where; investigate with an open heart and mind, and take to yourself that which is good, and honest, and beautiful, and true. In that way will the Anglican tradition of worship be kept alive, venturing forth from known positions to encounter God afresh on the edges of our experience. In change and renewal shall we be most faithful to the tradition of the Church (and to the insights of Cranmer), and thus continue to build up patterns of worship of incomparable richness and diversity.

10

Learning Good Habits

The Anglican Approach to Prayer

This chapter may end up being the shortest, simply because it will be the hardest to write. First of all, prayer is simply *hard*. You never seem to be able to make the time, you never know what to say, and it can seem that there's never anybody in when you call. Priests' studies may be lined with books *about* prayer, but they will probably be the first to admit that knowing any amount of theory doesn't get you very far; the actual business of praying is another thing altogether. Secondly, the all-inclusive nature of the Anglican Communion means that the experience of prayer in our tradition is incredibly varied and almost impossible to categorize.

Reflecting the wide and colourful spectrum of Anglican ecclesiology referred to in Chapter Seven, the picture conjured up by the mere mention of the word 'prayer' can mean anything from a deliverance ministry in a charismatic prayer group, to contemplative prayer in an enclosed convent, with choral evensong in a cathedral setting somewhere in between.

Until fairly recently, it might have been said that the basic Anglican approach to prayer was low-key, pragmatic and with a reluctance to expect too much. For most it was a hard slog, with the good old British stiff upper lip coming in very handy. Two developments in recent decades have changed this picture quite significantly, and the whole question is suddenly more interesting.

To use a dietary analogy, my parents' generation grew up knowing only an unremitting diet of 'solid English food'. Eating out was an unheard-of activity, and the very idea of foreign food quite unthinkable. Changing social patterns and holidays abroad have given my own generation a quite different attitude, and to experience different foods from different cultures is now part and parcel of everyday life for all sectors of society, whether dining at a French restaurant in Fitzrovia or queueing at the Balti take-away in Balsall Heath.

Let's begin with the basic fare, thinking of the historic pattern of liturgical prayer – Office and Eucharist – as the solid Anglican food which has sustained us over the centuries. Later, we will turn to the spiritual equivalent of the two dishes which have most revolutionized our eating habits – the hot Indian curry and French *nouvelle cuisine*. The previous notes on worship will have given you a few clues about the Anglican love of dignity and order and under-statement in liturgy, and the same goes for prayer generally.

Although traditionally great store is set by personal prayer as the foundation of all that we do together, Anglicans can get quite defensive about prayer as a 'private matter', so it is very difficult to assess exactly what is going on in the home as a place where a prayer life is nurtured and exercised. The signs are not encouraging; the increasingly frantic timetables of most families make the simple giving of thanks before meals, let alone a short time of reflection together, less and less practicable. Even for the individual to carve out a few minutes quiet in a normal, healthy (= crazy) household is virtually impossible, and the privacy of the bathroom is not the most conducive environment for heavenly thoughts.

J. L. Carr, in his novel *The Harpole Report*, recounts the story of the teacher who proudly claimed twenty years' experience in a particular school, only to be corrected that she had in fact only had the same experience twenty times. Unless continually renewed by our life together in the community of

faith, our own personal prayer can deteriorate to the level of that poor teacher's experience of education; not a journey of constant exploration, but a continual reiteration, day in day out, of the same few words learned years ago at confirmation class or even Sunday School.

For these reasons, we as Anglicans know our great need of each other when it comes to prayer. No one is better placed than the parish priest to realize how one's prayer life is so easily eaten away by the phone call as one is leaving the house, the conversation that it seems so important to continue, the cry for help that no one could refuse. For that reason, the clergy know full well that the Daily Office is their only hope of retaining any prayer life at all, the discipline of being in a certain place at a certain time where others will meet with you in mutual dependence in prayer.

Most of our praying is therefore done together – at the Eucharist or Daily Office in church or in the house group at home – and we realize only too well our need of being 'carried' by others, especially at times when we feel dry or despairing. In this way we learn that a prayer life is not just for Christmas but for keeps. Participation in the liturgy is not restricted to the times we feel in the mood, but every week without fail. By praying together we help one another learn good habits of prayer, and hopefully our praying spills over into the rest of our lives, even if it's only mumbling to God in the car as we crawl to work. Through praying together we are given something to chew on when we chat to God, recalling moments together in the community of faith, the phrases used, the refrains sung.

Typically, Anglicans award high marks for presentation. We like things to be done well, and prayed well, with beautiful language uttered mellifluously in musical cadences with an ear finely-tuned for the dramatic pause. At the same time we prize sincerity and an appropriate humility when addressing the Almighty, scorning the meticulous enunciations of the pompous cathedral canon as much as the vacuous repetitions

of the over-familiar prayer group member, sprawled cross-legged in an easy chair.

We like praying that is sincere but not over-earnest, inspired but not ostentatious, and we are easily embarrassed by others making fools of themselves. We try to be faithful to the advice of Jesus on the subject (Matt. 6:6–14), being quite keen on prayer as a private affair (v 6) and quite definitely not keen on 'heaping up empty phrases' (v 7). On the whole we are gentle and unpretentious in our praying, valuing regular routine rather than religious zeal.

Traditionally, the Anglican instinct is to go for set prayers composed by others, trusting, with typical deference, the experience and wisdom of 'the all-time greats' rather than one's own stumbling and stammering efforts. I still remember now the framed copy of the prayer of that old soldier of Christ, St Ignatius Loyola, which hung on the bedroom wall of my grandparents' house, and which I came to know by heart as a child:

> Teach me good Lord, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will.

Later on, the second collect at Morning Prayer was one I used to recite to myself between the bus stop and the school gates, just in case the classroom bully was in energetic form. It was called the Collect for Peace, of which I felt greatly in need at the time:

> O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Provided we remember the cautionary tale of J. L. Carr's teacher, and constantly seek to spread our wings, familiar and much-loved prayers such as these, repeated over and over again, can be extremely effective at calming nerves and soothing the soul, and as Anglicans we have readily available to us more than our fair share of absolute winners which, if you take the trouble to learn one or two off by heart, will be found true friends in time of pray-er's block.

Cranmer's matchless collection of prayers retained in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer is justly renowned as a priceless treasure. Many were brand new creations of the period, while others were culled from a surprisingly wide range of sources. These included translations from the Latin of the Sarum Rite, that quarry of liturgical goodies originating at Salisbury Cathedral but in general use across England by the eve of the Reformation, and more exotically, adaptations from the revised breviary of the Spanish Cardinal Francisco de Quinones, commissioned by none other than Pope Paul III, Henry VIII's bitter enemy. Cranmer knew quality when he saw it, and didn't hesitate to poach where appropriate, whatever the source. This was entirely in keeping with the Anglican instinct to break new ground while at the same time carefully maintaining continuity with the best of all that had gone before.

Called 'collects' because they collected the themes of the day and the thoughts of the faithful into one short prayer at the beginning of the Eucharist, these prayers came to symbolize and encapsulate the approach to God typical of Anglicanism. They were learnt parrot-fashion in schools and confirmation classes, so that phrases from them became embedded in English usage, with an application far beyond the confines of church life. They became part of our culture. Here is a typical example, and a favourite of mine; the collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, first translated from the Latin of the Sarum Missal in the 1549 book:

> O God, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here is a prayer you can savour, ponder on and chew over and never exhaust its possibilities: a prayer worth praying. What's more, to enjoy it you no longer have to flounder amidst the archaisms of sixteenth and seventeenth-century language, for these prayers have been redrafted and further improved in subsequent revisions of the original prayer books: *The Alternative Service Book 1980* and *Celebrating Common Prayer* (1992). So, for example, in 1980 the above collect was transposed to the Last Sunday after Pentecost (then the new classification for 'ordinary' Sundays not falling within a particular liturgical season), and was rewritten in contemporary language, with God now addressed as 'merciful' (a characteristic of the Godhead perhaps necessary as never before in view of our dithering on liturgical reform?)

In 1992, this collect's further revision reflected the movement, during the intervening period, towards a more inclusive language. It now reads:

> Merciful God,
> you have prepared for those who love you
> such good things as pass our understanding:
> pour into our hearts such love towards you
> that we, loving you above all things,
> may obtain your promises,
> which exceed all that we can desire;
> through Jesus Christ our Lord ...

On the debit side, our reliance on set forms has left us rather tongue-tied in this 'second age of the Spirit', when Christians of every tradition are becoming more at home with free, unstructured prayer. Anglicans might well be heard declining

an invitation to open a meeting with prayer simply because they 'haven't brought their book' with them, and going back to our dietary analogy, this is where we come to the spiritual equivalent of the two new culinary delights which have revolutionized our way of eating.

The 'hot Indian curry' which has spiced up our prayer life in the Anglican Communion in recent decades, and which is now available on practically every street corner, is the dynamic experience of charismatic prayer in which God is experienced afresh, interested and involved in the smallest details of our life: a person to whom we can address our every concern and need and who can act with power, directness and immediacy. Significantly, this hot food can be taken sitting in the restaurant or can be taken away for home consumption.

It is an explosive concoction which cannot be contained within pew or prayer book. The good news about it is that the days of prayer as a hard slog are over; we are no longer expected to struggle through set forms, but actually to *enjoy* it as it equips us for the Christian journey with a new sense of confidence in a God who can do anything. By and large, the Evangelical wing of the Church has taken to this 'spicy food' in a big way, and as a result has been renewed and energized. Furthermore, the Renewal Movement (the movement that started out as the Charismatic Renewal during the 1960's) has watered all parts of the Anglican garden to some extent, blurring the edges of the old rigid ways of doing things, giving us all a new, more relaxed approach to prayer and teaching us a few new tunes with which to sing the Lord's song. Today, the ability (if not the preference) to pray extempore is regarded as part of the basic kit of ministry, irrespective of tradition. In a complementary development of mutual upbuilding, printed collections of treasured prayers are more widely used than ever. 'Political praying' (i.e. addressing God in language and forms decreed by a particular party or movement) is largely a thing of the past.

The Renewal Movement is characterized by an exuberance and freedom in prayer and corporate worship, a renewed sense of direct access to God recalling the Church to the period described in the Acts of the Apostles, with high expectations of healings, speakings in tongues, prophecy and other signs and wonders revealing God's direct intervention in our ordinary affairs. Even if a waning of the initial ecstatic period can be observed, the Renewal Movement has achieved immeasurable good in 'loosening up' the Church, causing us to pray and to express our love for God with less inhibition and awkwardness, the name of Jesus more often on our lips. Above all, the Renewal Movement has given us a fresh confidence in our praying, and a new emphasis on praise rather than petition. This confidence was born of a conviction of God's power at work in his people, in the face of the demoralizing effects of what seems like a media campaign to destroy the Church by marginalization and ridicule.

There is however a second and quite different culinary delight which has had widespread influence: French *nouvelle cuisine*. Its equivalent for us is the radical approach to prayer, which is minimalist in style, taking us back to basics and to a fearless reappraisal, in the light of experience and of world events, of what we imagine is happening when we pray. In this process, we discard as far as possible all the jargon collected over two thousand years, and translate the meaning of God into our own language. (And the fact that this pulls us in the opposite direction to charismatic prayer only serves to make the whole subject more interesting – it's just as well we're Anglicans!) Thus Bishop David Jenkins, in a talk given in 1967,[1] described the two foci of prayer as worship – 'the response to the supremely valuable, ultimately transcendent personalness who is God', and grace – 'the awareness ... of the presence of an otherness which gives resources beyond one's own.'

Whilst there are countless Anglicans who can exult in God's triumphant power at work in the world, there are

others (who knows how many because no one quite dares own up) who are uneasy with the notion of a God who can, after earnest prayer, heal an individual's toothache, but who apparently remains powerless or unconcerned with the fate of six million of his specially chosen people in the Holocaust.

In other words, 'God as an interventionist does not cut any ice',[2] and to suppose that God responds only in some cases and not in others makes it even worse, for then God appears to be a moody and capricious tyrant. Intercession is therefore a real problem, and perhaps somewhere along the line we have got hold of the wrong end of the stick, approaching God in prayer like children with a list for Santa Claus rather than as adults content simply to bask in God's presence. This may help us grow into prayer defined by Christopher Scott as 'allowing my being to become in tune with Being itself'.[3] This may sound a bit New Age for our liking, but it's probably what Jesus was busy doing when he went off alone into solitary places, getting away from the disciples so that he could enjoy the company of his Father. Certainly we have no hint of shopping-list praying from Jesus. In the one prayer he taught us, the only request is for sufficient daily sustenance, and this is set firmly within a framework of praise to the holy God revealed as Father. When, before his arrest, he did plead earnestly for his own rescue, the answer was 'no'. Or was that Gethsemane prayer a cry of human need which Jesus would not normally have graced with the name of prayer? Perhaps he expected no answer, for his life-long unity with the source of all being meant that he already knew the shape of things to come.

There are of course many other nourishing dishes available in addition to these two described in some detail. All the renewal movements of Anglican history contribute to the offering of a rich feast of prayer. While the Evangelical gives us a fresh appreciation of simplicity and sincerity born of an awareness of God's mercy and grace, the Catholic never allows us to imagine we are alone when we pray, pointing us

to the unseen host of prayer-partners which is the Communion of Saints. We are not talking here of course of praying *to* the saints, but of asking them to pray *with* us, which seems a pretty natural thing to do if we believe that 'death has no more dominion over us' and that 'dead' fellow-Christians are as alive (indeed probably more alive) than those we see around us and whose prayers we request.

It is to the Catholic movement also that we owe the restoration of the Religious Life (communities of women or men consecrated to God by life-long vows) after a gap of three hundred years following Henry VIII's closure of all Religious Houses in England. Women led the way (in the 1840s this was the only opening for full-time service available to them), and today in the Church of England over sixty different Religious Communities provide oases of prayer, and remind us of the many ways of prayer, developed by the saints over the centuries, into which we can tap here and now. There really was no need for the Beatles to have gone all that way to India ... the Church has known about meditation for a very long time (though perhaps we've kept it too much of a good secret). Today, the Indian sub-continent has come to us, in the shape of the dramatic growth in the proportion of our population of Asian origin, and if present trends in birth rates continue, Muslims will outnumber Christians in the foreseeable future. At the same time, rampant Western materialism eats away at spirituality in all its forms.

In the face of these developments, we need to display renewed confidence, not by banging the Christian drum, but by taking the lead in exploring ways in which all those in this country who seek God can learn, if only to a limited extent, to pray together. The Muslim's submission to the will of God, and the Buddhist's self-surrender to the Infinite, can teach us a lot, and even help redress the balance of Christian prayer which is all too often centred on self rather than God. In this process the Church of England has a special role as the body recognized by other Christians, as well as by those of

other religions, as 'mother' of the family of God-seekers gathered on these shores.

Nevertheless, Anglicans do not think of themselves as exercising a dominant role in the world's praying. We plod along on the beat rather than rushing around amidst the glitz of the International Prayer Squad, but we get the job done. Our big names are not in the same league as Teresa of Avila or Catherine of Siena, but are gentle hermits like Richard Rolle (fourteenth-century), priest-poets and country parsons like George Herbert (seventeenth-century), or wild, angry men of God like R. S. Thomas in our own generation.

Above all, Anglicans tend not to get too hung up about structures and formularies of prayer, preferring to 'chat to the boss' whenever and wherever it is possible, engaging him in polite but relaxed conversation. In this way we aim to develop a prayer life that becomes second nature to us, and in the end (and this usually takes a whole lifetime) is as natural as breathing.

Robert Llewellyn[4] likens prayer to children at play; they don't realize they are playing, they are just getting on with doing it. They do not need to be interrupted to have what they are doing analysed or explained to them; that would kill their play stone dead. This picture appeals very much to the Anglican mind. We'd like to think that in getting on with doing it, rather than thinking about it, and in fostering a naturalness in our relationship with God that is neither craven nor casual, we had got it just about right.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

11

Checks and Balances

The Anglican Approach to Authority

Anglicanism is often caricatured as a lawless conglomeration of individualists doing their own thing, but although we all long for a little more authority from time to time (usually when things aren't going our way), on the whole we believe that the Anglican balance between central structure and local responsibility is about right. The problem is that it is very difficult to determine how the Christian Church should be governed (i.e. what on earth would God do with the Church?), even if we had a free hand to start all over again.

Despite the blood, sweat and tears expended down the centuries, all attempts to establish indisputable scriptural if not divine authority for this or that theory of Church government and structure remain contentious. It is increasingly questioned whether Jesus himself had much interest in structuring his disciples into a recognizable and separate entity which in due course could come to be known as 'the Church'.

For Jesus, authority lay in the will of God, and God's will was discerned by those who gave God absolute obedience, not merely by keeping a set of organizational rules, but by going beyond the rules to live God-filled lives. Final authority lay in the one single absolute of love, even to the extent of laying down one's life for one's friends. Furthermore, Jesus of Nazareth reserved his most severe condemnation for any form of religious structure or pressure group that got in the way of this new relationship with God.

The first Christian communities are interesting prototypes for modern churches to study and learn from, but even they were living in a different world from us. Although it is hard for us in mainstream churches to imagine how anyone could have got away with the authoritarianism exercised by Paul as described by the writer of Acts, don't forget that an autocratic leadership is alive and well today in parts of the house church movement and in various sects (so count your blessings!) Paul is presented to us as an ecclesiastical version of a US marshall stamping law and order on tension-ridden townships of the Wild West. A little reading between the lines reveals that things were far from being that clear-cut among the first Christian communities of the eastern Mediterranean. One indication that things easily went awry is that those who followed him felt it necessary to be economical with the truth by attributing to him letters they themselves had written in an attempt to crack down on indiscipline and abuse of power.[1] Neither Paul nor his followers were averse to frequent readings of the riot act, and we can safely say that the 'thorn in the flesh' referred to by Paul (2 Cor. 12:7) was not over-frequent meetings of his Parochial Church Council. The Enabling Act was still a long way off.

Those first Christian communities were development corporations rather than local authorities, i.e. provisional pioneering bodies supervising the injection of substantial amounts of capital into new areas of growth. Development corporations in England have proved themselves incredibly successful agencies for putting in place the infrastructure that will enable new balanced and vibrant communities to grow and prosper, but we don't want them to go on for ever. We become uneasy about unelected bodies having so much power, and sooner or later the agitation begins for government by locally elected representatives. The fact that the local authorities may not be able to do the job half as well is seen as beside the point, for such transition of power represents an inevitable development in western democratic societies.

So with the Church, even though it is no democracy. The first communities were pioneers in a provisional phase of development spiritually financed by the injection of substantial amounts of Holy Spirit. Those were heady days, and if you'd like a taste of how things were, seek out a copy of the *Didache*, the earliest Christian text outside the New Testament, and earlier than the four Gospels.[2] The *Didache* recalls a primitive stage of development when travelling missionaries and prophets held sway, and when bishops had yet to be distinguished from presbyters. Subsequent developments saw the Church having to settle down to respectability, coming to terms with an emphasis on maintenance rather than mission. Of course there was no question then of increased democratization, but nevertheless the balance between central authority and local responsibility gradually shifted towards the latter, albeit in the shape of feudal lords who gradually obtained the right to nominate to the bishop the priests who would care for the parishes in their domain.

Ever since 312, when the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as the State religion, and the Church accepted State protection and a privileged position in society, the Church has found itself severely hampered in exercising a purely spiritual authority over its membership. Over the centuries, deals had to be made and compromises arrived at in order for the Church to survive under all kinds of secular regimes, many of them indifferent if not antagonistic to the Christian cause. All this weakened the power and influence of the Church as a centralized ecclesiastical authority, and it was at times reduced to a subservient role in the face of secular domination.

As we have already seen, in the twelfth century Henry II was responsible not only for the death of Thomas Becket but also for his previous appointment as Archbishop and his exile for six of his eight years in office. In the sixteenth century, Henry VIII's attempts to prevail upon Pope Clement VII to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon were foiled, not so

much by an ecclesiastical authority dispassionately arbitrating on a complex pastoral matter, but by a secular power which held greater sway than did Henry in the Pope's estimation. Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, was a much bigger fish than the English king, and was not a man for the Pope to cross needlessly. By an ironic twist of fate, the Emperor's niece happened to be none other than Catherine of Aragon, so Henry, arguing a difficult case to start with, found his goose well and truly cooked by this fateful combination of religious and political factors. It has ever been thus in the Church after Constantine.

The highly centralized and authoritarian structure which is the Roman Catholic Church of today, and which is increasing in intensity under Pope John Paul II, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Many features of this impressive structure owe their origin to the nineteenth-century Ultramontane movement which sought to restore the glories of the past and elevate the papacy at the expense of national interests and even of episcopacy itself. In this, modern technology has joined hands with Curial ambition to create a centralized power base that medieval popes could not even have dreamt of.

All this needs to be said to set the Anglican experience in the context of Church history throughout Europe. We may not be very good at centralized authority, but others' experience tells us that we shouldn't be. There's no need for us Anglicans to hang our heads in shame because we don't have an ecclesiastical version of the secret police to ensure conformity to the party line. Our naivety in these matters should be a source of pride. Amazingly, and perhaps by accident rather than design, we have once again come up with an answer that works well and that gives us a right balance between head office and local branch, between Church and church.

Of course there is a price to pay. Our bishops are sometimes an embarrassment, and we can be left feeling short-changed in the matter of apostolic authority exercised with

unfaltering élan. At worst, the primary episcopal virtue seems to be that of not rocking the boat (rather than navigating it), with the ability to act the Butlin's redcoat coming in a close second. All that being said, we believe it a price worth paying, in return for the freedom to be ourselves, and to live in an atmosphere unclouded by fear or by attempts to quench the Spirit.

'Head Office' for English Anglicans is an amorphous mass of ill-defined institutions and symbolic figures dressed up to the nines, hovering somewhere between Westminster Abbey and Canterbury – an amalgam of splendid services at Westminster Abbey, measured debates in the General Synod, and men in grey suits at desks at No. 1 Millbank, keeping the wheels turning. This is Church with a capital 'C', in our case the dear old Church of England, at which level we can see clearly the Anglican love of checks and balances which maintains not only equilibrium but also, unless we work really hard, the status quo. Since 1969 it has become more democratic and more accountable through the synods (governing councils of ordained and lay members) set up at national, diocesan and deanery level.

The Anglican Communion is a family of churches for whom episcopacy – i.e. government by bishops – is the essential element of their common life. At every level of the Church we have therefore a delicate balance of power between episcopal authority and legislative assembly: between the bishops, whom everyone imagines to be more powerful than they really are, and the synods, which everyone imagines to be less powerful than they really are. The bishops and clergy may manage the shop and chat up the customers, but the synods grind away in the back room, keeping the business plan firmly under their control.

At national level, the House of Bishops forms the consecrated hierarchy to whom the people in the parishes look for a lead, and to whom they feel they can relate better than to a committee or a bureaucracy. At the same time the House of

Bishops is but one out of three houses in the General Synod (alongside Clergy and Laity), each of which, voting in separate houses, must approve any legislative measure put before it to achieve its implementation. The bishops have colluded in the increasing devolution of power to council and committee, stifling initiative and hampering creative reform and the disposition of manpower. Arising from the Turnbull report of 1996, further legislation is in the pipeline to achieve tighter centralization and bureaucratization. Most of this passes over the head of the average person-in-the-check-out-queue, who probably thinks that on the whole it's rather nice to be part of something big and impressive that is so much part of the fabric of England, even if the hem is sagging on the best embroidered cope, and the crowds don't turn out on the streets as they used to do.

When we come to the diocese, the area under the jurisdiction of a bishop, we see the same balance of power at work between the diocesan bishop as 'father in God' to the household of faith and to all who live in his patch, and the diocesan synod. The diocesan synod is made up of clerical and lay members elected by deanery synods, though people are not generally falling over themselves to stand for election, having better things to do with their Saturdays. A diocesan synod is not usually a strong body with a mind of its own, and often appears passive and ineffectual in the face of the political skills of the professional movers, shakers and speech-makers. This does mean of course that at this level a creative bishop has more of a fighting chance to effect change and implement his vision, a degree of manoeuvrability essential if the bishop is to be in any sense a prophet as well as a priest.

The bishop (or 'overseer' in the New Testament) symbolizes our corporate life as Anglicans in a particular diocese, and through his fellow bishops links us to all our sister communities across the world. Bishops today are burdened with high expectations and a great deal of loyalty and

affection, but such are the demands of simply keeping the show on the road that they find themselves hamstrung in implementing radical programmes for change. This of course presupposes a desire for change, and it can be argued that the checks, balances and endless consultation surrounding episcopal appointments have made bold, creative, strategic thinking even more of a rarity than it was. The diocesan bishop in most cases is assisted by a suffragan bishop or two, and by his archdeacons and the dean or provost of his cathedral. Together with one or two other key players, this group forms the bishop's staff meeting – the think-tank responsible for the day-to-day running of the diocese.

There are forty-four dioceses in England. Some of them, like Oxford, Chelmsford and Lichfield, are ridiculously large, and more ridiculous still is the failure of the Church of England to create any new provinces (regional groups of dioceses) since AD 735. We're still thinking about it, or thinking about setting up a commission to think about it. Each diocese is sub-divided into archdeaconries (usually two) and rural deaneries (around twelve in an average-sized diocese). Each deanery – a cluster of ten to twenty parishes – is served by its own deanery synod. Because we haven't yet worked out what a deanery should be, or how much power its synod should exercise, and because we have extracted all teeth from the rural dean's role (not that he had any in the first place), deanery synods tend to be talking shops avoided by the more dynamic of our parish members.

At parish level we see again the delicate balance in play between episcopally authorized leader and legislative council. The oversight of each parish is delegated by the bishop to a parish priest, who is given authority over the local church but who works alongside the people of God, not lording it over them. Although the 'cure of souls' gives the priest a great deal of freedom of movement in matters spiritual and liturgical, he or she exercises authority in

partnership with the parochial church council, whose backing must be secured for any major change in parish life as well as in matters of finance.

In England the parish priest (rector or vicar), on being installed in a parish, has usually been granted the freehold possession of the benefice, which means in effect that he or she cannot be sacked unless something goes very seriously wrong. Moreover, the priest can continue in office up to the age of seventy. Historically this has been a useful means of ensuring the priest's independence both of overpowering bishops or patrons, and of troublesome congregations, tipping the balance of power at parochial level very much the priest's way. Imagine for just a moment, however, any organization in which a branch manager, no matter how inefficient, downright lazy or barking mad, was a fixture for life (even when his branch had practically collapsed around him), and you will realize why the Church cannot afford this luxury for very much longer. Unless we can develop an ordained leadership ready to serve where they are needed and for as long as they are needed (and that goes for the whole army, not just the infantry), and unless the General Synod grasps without flinching the nettle of freehold possession, all our talk of strategic planning and renewal of the structures is exposed as mere play-acting.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, we will hopefully find the parish priest hard at work, assisted by two laypeople (the wardens) elected by the annual meeting of parishioners, whose first priority is to work closely with the priest for the good of the parish. They will be supported by the other members of the parochial church council, and in our more healthy parishes there is a growing emphasis on collaborative ministry, with a large degree of delegation to ministry teams of various kinds. The days of the one-man or one-woman show are over.

As usual in Anglicanism, the system allows you to make of it what you will. The balance of power can swing wildly

between clergy and people; in some parishes the priest hides under the table at the wardens' approach, in others, by sheer force of personality, he or she gets away with murder. But to talk of 'clergy' and 'laity' as two distinct or even opposing camps is really old hat; the best priests are those who are eroding the distinctions in order to build local Christian communities in which ministry is shared by all those willing to give the necessary commitment.

Underlying all these checks and balances at various levels is the principle of episcopacy, although, as we have seen, with our track record of failing to re-draw provincial and diocesan boundaries, we seem at times to be doing our best to make it unworkable. I feel I must apologize for my church at this point, but for every apology you will find a hundred champions of the status quo with a thousand plausible reasons for doing nothing, reasons which mask failure of vision and loss of nerve.

Episcopacy is important to get right because Anglicans believe it's about as good a system as God is ever likely to leave us with. The kind of 'constitutional episcopacy' found within Anglicanism combines the authority of the person – the commissioned and anointed 'overseer' of the flock of Christ – with the authority of the people – the holy community of the faithful, commissioned and anointed in baptism. This 'balance of power' gives both a sense of common calling and purpose among the whole people of God, and a sense of personal allegiance to the bishop as our 'father' (and already 'mother' in some parts of the Anglican Communion) of the household of faith.

All this means that Anglicans tend to be rather ambivalent about their bishops, as about other authority figures in English society; we are all in favour of them for as long as they leave us in peace and tell us what we want to hear.

There is an innate respect for the office of bishop, and a visit from the bishop is still an event that church members

will turn out for. The bishop tends to be highly popular with the faithful as a symbol of our shared life and as a source of affirmation and good cheer in good times and bad. We tend to take much less notice of the bishop when he says something we don't agree with, and the days of bishops as public mediators, addressing crowds of workers in an industrial dispute (a fairly common occurrence within living memory) have gone, along with gaiters and frock coats. Even within the household of faith, their authority has been so eroded by the many checks and balances at every stage of decision-making, introduced as part of synodical government, that the bishop is no longer master of his own house. In particular, the bishop's ability to appoint and move parish priests is severely curtailed both by the refusal of the General Synod to abolish the parson's freehold (by which a priest may hold a benefice for his or her working life) and by new rights of veto awarded to parish representatives. In this the bishops have sold their birthright for a mess of compromises, to the great detriment of the mission of the Church.

Authority at the national level therefore lies with the General Synod rather than the bishops, and it is perhaps only at the local level that a large degree of authority is vested in one person, the parish priest.

Although the parish priest's powers have not been untouched by the creeping paralysis of synodicalism, he or she remains on the whole a pope in his or her own parish. This should not for a moment be confused with unchallenged respect and adulation, for the English tamed their 'holy man' long ago, allotting him a place in society equivalent to that of an ecclesiastical butler, a man not expected to hold opinions, but to conduct the ceremonies of the meal as they have always been conducted. In the last analysis people feel he is there to do what he is told.

So when it comes to authority, we Anglicans like to have our cake and eat it; we like the notion of an authority figure,

but like to hedge him or her about with enough restrictions to ensure that, in the last resort, we can do our own thing. Very English, very Church of England.

12

Loitering with Intent

The Anglican Approach to Membership

St Paul probably has quite a difficult time with the Church of England. Hot-headed impatient types like Paul (and like me for that matter) would prefer everything to be cut and dried, to know who's in and who's out, to know who our friends are. Such a certainty just isn't possible in the Anglican ethos. At times this drives me mad, at other times I can see (damn it!) that it is the only way for the followers of Jesus to behave.

Anglicanism has a big heart, and while this may yet prove to be its downfall, let's give it the benefit of the doubt and say that our dear old mum has wide open arms and a voluminous cosy bosom. She's always lovely to come home to, because the kettle's always on, and she never starts off with an interrogation as to where on earth we've been for the last ten years. It's love first, questions later. All this makes for a very untidy house, dirty washing everywhere and suitcases always in the hall, for there's always someone coming or going in this free and easy environment, and people loitering with good intent.

The definition of church membership is inevitably broad and hazy; it all depends on where you're starting out from, on where you start peeling the onion.

On the outer extremity we have all those who will enter 'C of E' on their hospital admission form – still the majority of the adult population. They would see membership of the Church as an automatic right bestowed on them by their nationality, a membership that doesn't need thinking about

because it is part and parcel of their Englishness. The Church colludes with this view by granting the privileges of membership on the sole basis of residency within a particular parish; baptism is usually available on demand, as are wedding ceremonies (albeit within a stricter legal framework) and funeral services. Although many priests make an attempt to invest these ceremonies with deeper meaning by requiring some indication of personal belief and commitment, they are usually worn down by the sense of outrage encountered among the public, and in the local press, for whom religion becomes the stuff of front page headlines once it can be rewritten as Bad News.

The typical Anglican line on this is that these rites of passage for an increasingly de-Christianized population are invaluable pastoral opportunities to be seized upon by a grateful Church. Those charged with the actual job of making a spiritual encounter out of a social event, where superstition rather than theology is likely to call the tune, may be pardoned for thinking otherwise.

While there is very little anyone would wish to do to tighten the screw with regard to funerals, where one is dealing with those made vulnerable by bereavement, there is much to be said for re-examining Anglican practice with regard to baptisms and weddings.

In theological terms, baptism is the mark of the Christian, the means of identification of those who follow Jesus the Christ, and any procedure which ignores this aspect of baptism devalues its currency. The practice of no-questions-asked baptism divorces the sacrament of initiation (usually in infancy) from active church membership in adulthood, giving rise to a huge constituency of people who are technically baptized, but whose nurture and growth in the Christian life is stillborn. This means that to talk thereafter of the community of faith as the 'community of the baptized' is so inaccurate as to give to our preaching and teaching a hollow ring. If we are seen to get up to such tricks, in what

other areas of life do people suppose we are pulling the wool over their eyes?

Anglicanism is quite rightly renowned for its generosity of spirit – but we are generous at the wrong point, caring little for who is or is not initiated into the mystical Body of Christ, but seeming more concerned about who is eligible to receive Holy Communion in the Eucharist. Whereas Jesus appears to have practically nothing to say about baptism, he has a very great deal to say about eating and drinking. His most significant and provocative prophetic act, repeated again and again, was to eat with 'publicans and sinners', with the riff-raff, the outcasts, the untouchables. In so doing, he was attempting to make real and tangible the unconditional love of God for all his children; admission was no longer to be by ticket only.

The Anglican parish of St Gregory of Nyssa in San Francisco (see Chapter Four) has led the way in giving concrete expression to this radical insight of Jesus, challenging the Christian Church to think again about where it has its sticking points. The community of faith at St Gregory's has reversed the usual liturgical order in the design of its new church building, so that the first thing the visitor comes across is the table set ready for a party, a powerful symbol of that unconditional love that welcomes us all with open arms. The Christian community first says 'come and eat, come and celebrate', and only after the Eucharist – and after the lunch served at the same table – is the route to the font discovered, a route that takes us out of the building into an enclosed garden where the waters of rebirth bubble in the baptistry set into the hillside.

First welcome: unconditional love expressed in an open table where no questions are asked; and only later initiation: tears of repentance and the costly business of surrender to God and reconciliation with those we have hurt.

Such a reversal of the customary pattern involves us in reversing also our usual priorities, tearing up the rule-book in relation to sharing the Eucharist, but rewriting the rules, and

making them a lot tougher, when it comes to enlisting new recruits in life-long service. Perhaps the early Church got us off on to the wrong foot all those centuries ago when it locked the doors and banished the catechumens before breaking bread in the Eucharistic meal. It was perfectly understandable, but led us inevitably away from the practice of Jesus himself into the 'dark ages' of restricted access and fenced altars, from which we are only just emerging.

Of course one swallow doesn't make a summer, and one parish in San Francisco doesn't change the traditional emphasis on baptism and confirmation as the gateway to communion, and yet it is entirely appropriate that an Anglican parish should lead the way in asking the penetrating questions, challenging mainstream churches to think again. Amongst the churches of the Catholic tradition, only in the Anglican Communion could such freedom of expression exist, enabling a parish to explore and reinterpret and revitalize the ancient faith.

Anglicans are also free to set a little less store by the credal formulae beloved of previous Christian generations as tests of orthodox belief and qualification for membership of the Church. Although this makes us easy targets for modern-day pharisees always on the look-out for doctrinal indiscretions, many Christians would admit (even if some of them have to face away from the camera to do so), that when they recite the creed every Sunday they are repeating parrot-fashion a string of doctrinal statements, which may no longer make any sense to them.[1] This is hardly surprising when we recall that creeds were first designed to defend the infant Christian Church against beliefs which were at that stage considered heretical. The contents of the creeds and their precise (often technical) phraseology represent carefully worked out responses to the controversies of the second and third centuries, when groups with opposing understandings of who Jesus was were wrestling for control of the Church.

This doesn't mean to say that we should cease to say the creeds, for they are a test of Church membership going back eighteen centuries, and they recall us to our common Christian heritage.[2] What we can and should do, however, is to look at them again in their historical context, unpack what the Church at that time was trying to say, and translate that message into the language and thought-forms of today.

The parish of St Thomas, Indianapolis (RC this time, but then progressive US Catholics are honorary Anglicans anyway!) has done just that in a predominantly black neighbourhood church. The community of faith in that place has wrestled with the problem of what the creed means for *them*, so that on entering its worship area you can pick up and reflect on this mid-Western late twentieth-century version of what was first hammered out in the fourth-century Middle East. It begins:

> We believe in God, the eternal source and spirit of life, whom Jesus knew as father, and whom we call our loving parent, and to whose deeds we testify.

This version may not be right for us, but it's OK for them, at least for the present, and we must work at our own version, speaking the language of the place and of the time in which God has incarnated us. This process is uncomfortable, but thoroughly Anglican, because although we like order and love history, we don't like to be told. We like working things out for ourselves.

Membership for Anglicans is therefore more about incorporation into a community than conformity to a set of credal formulae or observance of a set of rules. I long ago gave up trying to provide baptism and marriage preparation classes, having come to realize that a period of participation in Sunday worship achieved more than a hundred classes in the back room of the church hall. Christianity is caught not taught; unless we can catch a vision of how good it is simply

to be around the altar of God with his people, then no amount of instruction will convince us otherwise. Conversely, once we have caught the vision, seen the point, then filling in the gaps of our knowledge is plain sailing. The head can always catch up with the heart, but the reverse process takes a lot longer, and for many individuals may never happen at all.

Throughout the Anglican Communion, confirmation by a bishop is the means by which new members are admitted to the Church, and I'll say more about that in the final section. The traditional pattern has been infant baptism followed by confirmation, usually in early to mid teens. This pattern is changing in response to two factors: the decrease in the proportion of the population now being baptized in infancy, and the deeper awareness of the need for an act of adult commitment in the Christian faith. As a result there is a growing trend towards confirmation in adulthood, and in cases where the candidate is not already baptized, baptism and confirmation become two parts of a single rite of initiation, preferably at the Easter Vigil in accordance with primitive tradition. In the case of the children of church families, permission can now be given for admission to Holy Communion before confirmation, a healthy development flowing from the rediscovery of the catechumenate as a useful apprentices' school for Christian training.

What membership actually entails will vary from parish to parish, but the basic norm is faithful Sunday worship, plus at least an evening per week when we can get to grips with the Christian life in greater depth. The big Sunday assembly and the small home meeting are both necessary for a healthy diet, for they feed and inform each other in the process of Christian formation. There can be no compulsion in a community of volunteers, but we can only build churches with building blocks that are on site, not those that are at home 'having guests to stay' or away 'with the caravan.' In the final analysis the core membership is defined, not by the

parish priest, but by self-selection as individuals opt in or opt out of what's on offer.

The Anglican approach to membership is that, while no one is going to compel you to do anything, we aim to create the kind of local Christian community in which you will want to do more, because you are known and valued, and your gifts recognized. Once you have decided to jump in with both feet, you have real scope for effective Christian service and for influencing the Church's way ahead. The possibilities are endless in a Church which has open access to (almost all!) its corridors of power.

The English may be great animal-lovers, but even we recognize the limitations of the parrot as a model of the thinking, praying and practising Christian. We love joining things, and we want others to join us in this great adventure of life together in the Church, but in our easy-going, and self-effacing and low-key way we would nevertheless want membership to *mean* something, and to move us further forward in a 'journey of continual discovery',[3] our horizons constantly changing as we go.

13

Seeing Both Sides

The Anglican Approach to Moral Questions

'On the one hand ... but on the other' is the classical caricature of an Anglican trying to come to a decision on a moral question. The Anglican position is easily dismissed as nothing more than a total inability to come down off the fence. All too conscious of this, we tend to write ourselves off as moral theologians, apologizing for our own woolly-mindedness. In fact it is when we grapple with moral problems, feeling very uncertain of the unequivocal rights and wrongs of the matter, that Anglicans discover (again by accident and much to our surprise) that we have the most to offer a perplexed world, and can hold our heads high within the community of Christian churches.

Certainly we see no virtue in weakness and prevarication; we want to be firm and clear in our advice to those who seek the 'Christian' way in a violently troubled world in which society is disintegrating in the face of rampant individualism. But it is becoming increasingly difficult to discern what is in fact truly 'Christian'.

To arrive at what is an authentic Christian response to any contemporary issue, we are for the most part best-guessing what Jesus of Nazareth would have done had he been here now. This is exceptionally difficult for the simple reason that it is highly likely that the concept of an organization of his followers existing two thousand years hence would have astonished the Gospel writers, for they expected

Christ to return at any moment. His recorded words are almost entirely devoid of detailed instructions on what to do, where and when. Equally, Jesus himself is concerned chiefly with attitudes and relationships, rather than precise codes of conduct, and we shall look in vain in the Gospels for detailed guidance on what to do in response to the moral dilemmas of today, many of which are thrown up by humankind's ceaseless advance in knowledge and technical ability, whether genetic engineering or nuclear physics.

Occasionally we come across fixed points, such as the prohibition against the taking of human life, which are constants for us as much as for the first-century Palestinian crowd that listened to Jesus on this subject, and who later were able to observe what he himself did when his theory was tested in practice. Even here, however, the Church has been busy muddying the waters over the centuries, dreaming up all kinds of exclusion clauses such as the development of the doctrine of the so-called 'Just War', or the concept of the State having the right to impose the death penalty in certain circumstances.

For the most part, then, we are indeed lost in a moral maze, and Anglicans, being familiar with the Hampton Court Maze incident in Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, are instinctively dubious of people like Harris who assert that 'It's very simple. It's absurd to call it a maze ... we'll just walk round for ten minutes, and then go and get some lunch.' [1] Anglicans find absolute certainty on moral questions an elusive goal, and for very good reasons which take us to the heart of the Anglican psyche.

To begin with, Anglicans are basically nice. We start out resolutely enough, with a very real desire to give a lead, to hold the line, and not to appear wimpish, but are bedevilled (or 'begoddled') by a very English sense of fair play coupled with a conviction that Jesus' distinctive characteristic was compassion rather than judgement. Our wonder at the grace of God is exceeded only by our awareness of human frailty,

and we are haunted by the words of good Mr Bradford,[2] no doubt the first moral theologian of the Anglican school.

We tend only too easily to be moved by the exceptional case and are as a result poor lawmakers. Whenever we are on the point of preaching a fierce sermon or enforcing a cast-iron rule, we seem always to be reminded of a particular story of an individual who has broken the rules but has been blessed by God. Perhaps King David, but more likely me. And so we mount the pulpit or wield the pen with slightly less certainty than we would like, being all-too-conscious of the possibility of preaching to others only to find ourselves disqualified.[3]

Secondly, total self-confidence in these matters can flourish only in a climate of intellectual totalitarianism in one form or another – theological positions with which Anglicans find themselves deeply uneasy. Absolute moral certainty demands cast-iron dogma in which there is no room for debate or uncertainty. Such an approach requires blind, unquestioning obedience to one of two forms of fundamentalism: belief in the literal truth of Holy Scripture as faxed through from God's administration HQ, or belief in an ecclesiastical structure to which the Holy Spirit has handed over sole trading rights. In other words, to believe that the exit from the moral maze is always immediately to hand, or at least just around the next corner, one has to be deluded and as daft as Harris.

The Anglican approach to moral questions is built on the three pillars of Scripture, tradition and common sense: on what the New Testament says, on what the Christian consensus has always tended to be, and on what works and rings true to our own day-by-day experience of God's activity in creation. None of these three is held to be sacrosanct to the exclusion of the other two, but they inform and enrich one another as the Church journeys slowly towards a deeper understanding of the wisdom of God.

It is for this reason that Anglicans find it difficult to jump to attention every time the bishops issue a statement or

produce a report on an aspect of Christian ethics, because our instinct is to check out their findings both with the New Testament and with our own experience of how things work in the real world. Likewise, we are not ones for rattling off chapter and verse of biblical texts taken in isolation, because we know that we must first discover in what sense those texts have been understood and applied by succeeding generations of Christians and in particular by those who have oversight of the Church today.

Amazingly, these checks and balances have led to a *modus operandi* which is far more robust than is generally realized, and which under closer scrutiny bears up well beside the rhetoric of others. Although the popular notion is that the Church of England is a bit of a pushover when upholding moral principles, the reality is otherwise.

Take, for example, marriage discipline. The controlling regulations for the Church of England on second marriages continue to uphold the principle of a life-long obligation, and that the use of the Marriage Service is inappropriate in the case of anyone who has a partner still living. Because Church and State view this question differently, and because clergy of the Established Church also act as registrars in the weddings they conduct, the individual parish priest is protected by law[4] from being compelled to allow second marriages to be solemnized in the church for which he or she is responsible. The final decision rests, however, with the parish priest following consultation with the bishop, although there remains a basic presumption against second marriages in church. The truth is that the Church of England, as the late great Andrew Wilson[5] always taught, should extricate itself from the wedding business forthwith, and press for the continental system in which a civil ceremony is the first step for every wedding couple, followed by a celebration in church for those for whom it has real meaning. If it cannot kick the habit altogether, it should at least devise alternative wedding liturgies for differing circumstances.

For all its faults, present Anglican practice in England compares favourably with that of other traditions. In the Free Churches, church weddings after divorce seem to be available on demand, while in the Roman Church the question is circumnavigated through the contrivance of annulment (80,000 of which are granted annually worldwide) and through the device of not counting the previous marriage of a non-Catholic partner. In these ways, participants are helped, not to admit their mistakes and begin again, but to proceed as if their first marriage was a figment of their theological imagination. For divorced Roman Catholics seeking remarriage in church, and whose first wedding was conducted in another Christian tradition, the procedure is even simpler, as the first marriage doesn't even appear on the canon lawyer's radar screen. The Anglican finds such stratagems distasteful because they are more concerned with legality than reality, and are at base simply dishonest. We put a high premium on honesty and calling a spade a spade, even if this results in a fair bit of dirty washing being washed in public. That is a small price to pay for freedom from double-think.

Of more critical importance on today's overcrowded planet is the subject of birth control, and here the Anglican approach has always been to resist any suggestion that procreation is the sole purpose of sexual love within marriage. We have Cranmer to thank for this, who, in his first Prayer Book of 1549, brought about 'revolutionary liturgical change by asserting that marriage could be fun'.[6] Developments in medical knowledge which make available a number of methods of contraception should benefit all humankind, and be used as widely as possible to decrease the birth rate, especially in Third World countries racked by poverty. To dream up theological reasons for frustrating the widest possible application of this knowledge, and restricting birth control to one method among many, appears to the Anglican mind as perverse in the extreme.

Homosexuality is the current 'hot potato' in the field of Christian ethics. Here, once again, the Anglican approach is

to proceed with caution, refusing to bow to pressure from either gay activists or right-wing fundamentalists. Somewhere in the middle will be found the way of sanctified common sense, in which reality can be recognized, good affirmed and wrongdoing condemned. It will probably be found that the real question for our society is not sexual orientation, but the development of the God-given capacity for life-long faithfulness and sacrificial love.

To make such values common currency in every culture, we shall need to develop what Hans Küng calls a 'global ethic', in which all the great religions underpin a shared understanding of, and upholding of, those human qualities and characteristics that make for a just, free and mutually accepting society. To become common property, the highest and truest values of civilization will need to be freed from claims of ownership by any one religious tradition. No one faith has a monopoly on goodness.

Anglicans have resigned themselves to not doing very well in the ethics paper (when I was ordained it wasn't even on the syllabus!) We are well aware that the fastest-growing esslesiastical communities are those offering cast-iron certainties in theology and ethics, an all-in package holiday away from thought and struggle, which is extremely attractive to a harassed society.

We know however, that life isn't like that. There are no neat solutions packed away between two covers, whether in the New Testament, the New Catechism, or Chairman Mao's Little Red Book. If ever Anglicans allow themselves a less-than-totally-humble thought, it is that one day the others will stop playing games and come and join us in the muddy waters. As Anglicans, our experience is that the stepping stones that will get us across are hidden and slippery, not obvious and bone dry and clear of the water, and the only way to find them is by getting wet. On the whole, we prefer that to starting out dry-shod and falling in halfway; the shock can kill you.

14

Sending Us Out

The Anglican Approach to the Wider Community

Here's where the Anglican feels on safer territory. Indeed for many Anglicans, especially in England, the wider community is always 'us' rather than 'them', such is the strength of their conviction that the Church, like Jesus, must lay down its life (and its boundaries) for the sake of those to whom it is sent as a messenger of Good News.

Typically, we like to be out and about getting things done, not least because we are easily embarrassed when God starts getting personal, or his servants emotional. Like the kindly neighbour in the house of the newly bereaved, we may not know what to *say*, but we always seem to know what to *do*; we make a cup of tea.

The Church of England's sense of commission to every single individual resident within our national boundaries brings with it a keen sense of responsibility for those who, in whatever sense, are our neighbours. This makes us uneasy about the drawing of boundaries and the over-exact definition of who are 'in' and who are 'out'. Anglicans tend to set out their stall, throw open their doors, and encourage all to feel they have a right to enter. Any exclusion is entirely self-imposed by those who choose to go elsewhere, like those followers of Jesus who, on hearing what he had to say, 'no longer went about with him' (John 6:66).

Central to this 'open house' policy is the realization of just

how widely and unconditionally Jesus himself defined 'neighbour'; and as a result we cannot bring ourselves to pass by on the other side. If this at times makes us look as if we are poking our collective nose into other people's business, then so be it. Better to do something (even if we get it wrong) than to stand idly by.

The Church's relationship to the wider community – how that community is identified and celebrated and entered into dialogue with – is an important question to address in whatever kind of situation the Church finds itself.

At the national level, the Church of England is like a shop with a very large doorway, in which we can window-gaze at things we like but don't want to buy, shelter from the rain when a sudden storm comes, or even spend the night if we're down on our luck. The day we put a metal grille over the shop front is the day we close down altogether, for the role of the Church of England is to be 'there' for everyone, and to rise to the occasion when called upon to do so.

At the local level, things will be a little more moribund. Although the designation 'parson' is not a favourite of mine (it smacks of a world when a tame priest was kept hanging around the place to provide services as and when required), it does at least recall us to the role of the priest as the representative 'person' of the local community. It is for this reason that you will find many a parish priest accepting all kinds of roles in the wider community – chairman of school governors, committee member of an interest group or sports club, even elected representative in local government – as part of a deliberate policy to weave together ever more effectively the overlapping communities of church and parish.

This ideal is perhaps more recognizable and realizable in stable and mainly prosperous communities in a rural or suburban setting, where the Church is working away to patch and strengthen the fabric of local society. It becomes more fraught when we come to those areas of severe social deprivation in our cities where the parish priest can easily become a

one-person social services department if so inclined. It is in these areas, where need is most conspicuous, that the Church's approach to the wider community is in sharpest focus.

'I'm not called to be a social worker' is an understandable riposte on the part of many priests concerned at the dilution of the distinctively Christian message in the midst of the Church's developing role as general 'provider'. This inner conflict is felt especially in urban areas of deprivation, where in our 'benefits culture', clergy and church workers are faced with demands for bus fares or baby food rather than Bibles. This chorus of practical need reaches its crescendo around five o'clock on a Friday evening as the social security offices close, the long weekend stretches ahead, and yarns are spun about giros failing to arrive and relatives ill in distant hospitals.

Getting the balance right is a tricky business, and we've often got it wrong, either locking ourselves into a spiritual ivory tower, or exhausting our limited human and financial resources in community work that may improve circumstances (for a while) but doesn't change people. Anglicans can, however, take heart from a long history of work with the wider community in which solid achievement has borne fruit that lasts. Education is a good example of where the Church in previous centuries led the way in pioneering the provision of facilities which we now take for granted as part of the fabric of society, and of the State's basic provision for its citizens.

In England, the National Society, founded by Joshua Watson in 1811, strove to establish a system of elementary education across the country, with training colleges to train the teachers for the new schools (the first college opened in 1841). The Church led the way and the State followed, but took a little time to catch up, not establishing its first Board Schools until 1870. Gradually the State came to play an increasing part in the financial support of the Church schools, so that today both Church and State schools shelter

beneath the same Local Education Authority umbrella, albeit with differing legal frameworks enshrining different educational philosophies. Although the State's educational umbrella now offers shelter to every child in the country, it is interesting to note that it is the church schools within the local education authority system which are top of the pops. They can usually boast waiting lists because they have established a reputation for good teaching and, even more significant in a disintegrating and directionless society, for the provision of a moral framework for young people to steer by.

In the days long ago, before training conferences were invented to keep the clergy off the streets, their favourite occupation was to form themselves into little groups and societies of like-minded thinkers in order to translate theory into action and generally make the world a better place. It seems the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries abounded in such intellectual pressure groups – the Clapham Sect (of Evangelicals) and the corresponding Hackney Phalanx (or Clapton Sect) of High Churchmen – and they were not talking shops but engines for social change arising from theological conviction.

The Clapham Sect could boast of William Wilberforce, crusader for the abolition of the slave trade, as a luminary, while the Hackney Phalanx had Joshua Watson, founder of the National Society, as a paid-up leading member. It is significant that Wilberforce was dissuaded by his guru John 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds' Newton from seeking ordination, on the grounds that his great oratorical gifts could advance the Christian cause more effectively in Parliament (where he was already an MP) than in the pulpit. This vocation of Christian service to society has become a well-trodden path in Anglican tradition.

This large-scale vision can be seen transposed into a minor key by priests who, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, laboured in the stoniest corners of the English vineyard. Fired up usually by one of the several religious

revivals which freshened up the Church during this period, they strode into action clutching Bible or crucifix in one hand and soup bowl in the other. These were the 'slum priests' who took on the toughest jobs available, ministering to those living in abject poverty in the burgeoning cities of Victorian England.

These initiatives were given an intellectual coherence by the Christian Socialist Movement which, founded during the 'Hungry Forties' of the nineteenth century, sought to bring about social reform. It was backed by theologians of the stature of F D Maurice, whose determination to apply Christian principles to the real world cost him his job as Professor of Theology at King's College, London. Although the movement lost momentum as an educative and political force, its long-term fruits were seen in the formation of trade unions and the early co-operative societies, and even today can be discerned at work leavening the lump of New Labour's massive 1997 election majority.[1]

Ever since, this dogged tradition of incarnational involvement in the struggles of humankind has refused to lie down and die, and has served constantly to prick the bubble of the Church's self-importance and preoccupation with the sacred understood in isolation from the secular. It is glimpsed during the First World War in the person of Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, priest-poet and the War's most illustrious chaplain, known to the troops as 'Woodbine Willie' because of the cigarettes he liberally distributed. His fierce compassion for the men thrown to needless deaths, and his ability to put into everyday language the eternal mysteries of God, life and death, make him a giant among the men of God.[2]

This instinct has never died, although it sometimes takes a catastrophe or two to shake the Church out of its complacency, to dust itself down and once again to wake up to the realities of life. Civil unrest in the most deprived areas of our cities in the 1980s (chiefly South London and Liverpool) jolted the Church into action, and following publication in

1985 of *Faith in the City* (the report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas) the Church Urban Fund was born. This Fund achieved not merely the distribution of £18 million to church-led projects for social action in our inner cities, momentous though that was, but the re-education of the whole Church to think in terms of social action.

In particular, the Church of England was shown how its great asset of a 'corner shop' in every town and village could at last be brought fully into play. This buildings 'burden' was revealed as a potential boon, and countless church premises in key locations of need were transformed into thriving centres of worship, training and community service. This process is not restricted to urban areas, for the countryside has deprivation of a different kind, in which village facilities are continually forced to close in the face of the car-borne rush to the nearest town. Anyone without a car is left stranded, like a whale on the beach when the tide goes out. In situations of need in rural areas, the parish church is beginning to rediscover its medieval role as a covered gathering space for the whole community. Examples are springing up all over the place of church buildings in which the nave is cleared of pews (that's real sacrifice for you!) and re-equipped as a social facility for the whole village, while the chancel becomes a worship space appropriate for present-day needs.

Salvation does not of course come through soup kitchens or pensioners' luncheon clubs, and half the clients at the drop-in centre may be taking the Church for a ride, but then so may half the 'respectable' people who read lessons and sit on church councils. We're all into cheating on God in one way or another, and putting yourself on the line for others is a risky business, as Jesus of Nazareth found. In the prayer at the end of the Eucharist, however, we offer God 'our souls and bodies to be made a living sacrifice', and the current malaise at all levels of society provides us with an opportunity to make our word our bond. In having compassion for

the crowds 'because they were harassed and helpless'[3] the Church finds its own soul. Wilberforce and Woodbine Willie need not spin in their graves, for our desire still is to be numbered among those who 'hear the word of God and put it into practice'.[4]

15

Taking a Lower Seat

The Anglican Approach to Other Traditions and Faiths

Here is Anglicanism at its most Anglican, and here it is in transition. By instinct Anglicans tend to think well of others and modestly of themselves, and at the same time they find themselves caught up in a global realignment of believers and seekers after truth.

In this global realignment, labels are becoming secondary to the reality of the encounter with that-we-call-God. This is the life force revealed to Moses as 'I AM WHO I AM', or even more simply as 'I AM' – the mystery of existence personified and initiating a relationship with us (Exod. 3:14).

When we come face to face with the stupendous truth that the mind behind the 100,000 million stars of our galaxy, the human body or a single snowflake, actually wants to get to know us and spend time with us, the anxious questions, 'Are you saved?' or 'Are you a Catholic?' or 'Do you keep the Deobandi Islamic code?' are enquiries of monumental inconsequence. The pursuit of exclusive religious purity has bedevilled humankind from day one and is coming to be seen as a fruitless obsession indicative of a concept of God that is basically too small to fit.

But we rush on too fast. Before examining the Anglican contribution of the part played by Christianity on the world stage among the major religions, we need to take a look at Anglicans in their relations with other Christians, i.e. with

other traditions within the one Christian fold (which are not other 'religions' as is so often asserted).

For Anglicans, by far the most important issue in ecumenical relations is the reunion of the Western Church, i.e. the reintegration of Canterbury with Rome. The bitter divisions of the sixteenth century are not our battles, and in many remarkable ways both communions have come full circle, making nonsense of our former exclusive categories and precise distinctions.

Go to the United States, for example, to discover how the Roman Catholic Church, in its remarkable expansion programme into the suburbs of the great cities, is designing worship spaces which in their layout and design proclaim the primitive Christian (and thereby Reformation) principles of the community of the baptized celebrating together word and sacrament. In a complementary movement of the Spirit, liturgical renewal in England has already brought about a situation where the Anglican celebration of the eucharistic rite proclaims both continuity with the primitive church and common cause with the rest of the Western Church. In our cathedrals, votive candles are lit, shrines of the saints visited and confessions heard; history has overtaken us, and the Spirit has made fools of us all.

What we in England have to remember is that relations between Canterbury and Rome have been bedevilled by history. In no other country in the world are there two claimants to the ancient title, two hierarchies claiming to provide authentic apostolic authority, two Catholic churches. No wonder that relations have been strained, and that claim and counter-claim, accusation and heated denial, have coloured our dialogue until now. To the Anglican, the Roman is a foreign interloper; to the Roman, the Anglican a State-controlled Protestant sect.

Against this background it was imperative that when official top-level conversations between the two communions were inaugurated, both sides should escape the English trap.

Accordingly, following the visit of Archbishop Michael Ramsey to Pope Paul VI in Rome in 1966, their Common Declaration initiated the setting up of an Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission which was thoroughly international on both sides. Under the joint chairmanship of a senior bishop from each communion, and meeting over the last thirty years in venues across the world, the Commission has made startling progress. To read the reports of the Commission so far published is to roll back the pages of history, rediscovering common ground in primitive Christianity and redefining former causes of division in ways that could unite us. The Commission's work is so heartening that one wonders what all the fuss has been about, as we proudly clung to our differences down the centuries.

This détente was further strengthened by the gracious and generous gesture by Pope John Paul II, during his visit to England in 1982, in kneeling in prayer alongside Archbishop Robert Runcie in Canterbury Cathedral and acknowledging his brother bishop as the successor of Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury.

Sad to say, all this good work was almost undone in the early 1990s when a couple of big spanners were thrown into the works which until then were humming along quite nicely (but we threw in one each, to retain a proper sense of balance). First the Vatican, after keeping us all waiting for an incredibly long time, in 1993 finally gave the Commission's findings an extremely luke warm (i.e. freezing), response, and then later that same year the General Synod's vote to admit women to the priesthood provided another serious setback. Thankfully, the Commission appears to remain unbowed and continues its good work.

At the Protestant end of the bridge, talks on reunion with the Methodist Church (hewn from the Anglican rock two centuries ago) are about to restart, having foundered in 1969 and again in 1972; while the Poorvoo Statement, ratified by General Synod in 1996, took us much closer to the Nordic

and Baltic Lutheran Churches. There is a loosening up at last, it seems.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, ecumenical progress at grassroots level continues at a leisurely pace. Here the thing to remember is that until the nineteenth century, Anglicans in an English context saw themselves quite simply as *the* Church. All other Christian groups (including Roman Catholics) were, again quite simply, 'Non-conformists' in that they chose not to conform to the practices of the English Church but to opt out and do their own thing. Because Church and society were seen as one, to opt out of the Church was equivalent to committing social hara-kiri. Even after the danger of physical persecution had passed, Christians of other traditions continued to experience no little inconvenience. Non-conformists were barred from holding office under the Crown until 1829, and from university entrance until 1871.

If Anglicans don't come out of this smelling sweetly, it should be remembered that such restrictive legislation had arisen in a period of intense religious feeling when blood had been shed on account of the finer points of Christian doctrine, and when doctrinal non-conformity was synonymous in the popular mind with disloyalty to the national cause. Furthermore, the proportion of the population affected by these prohibitions was comparatively small. Since the removal of all discriminatory legislation from the statute books in the nineteenth century, Anglicans have leaned over backwards to make up for past misdeeds with a generosity of spirit which is not only typically English in its self-deprecating nature, but also symptomatic of an established Church at ease with itself and its role in life.

For example, the removal in recent years of restrictions concerning participation in the Eucharist at Anglican altars, and in eligibility for election to parochial church councils, means that the Church of England has established a genuine open-house policy with regard both to worship and to

participation in the life of the local church. As a result, the onus of non-participation is placed fairly and squarely on the individual. The Church offers a general invitation to the party, and only the scruples of those invited can cast a cloud over the proceedings.

Theologically, a member of the English Church is a Christian first and an Anglican second, and this is highly significant when it comes to relations with other Christian churches. The Anglican looks askance at members of other traditions who assert their brand label, rather than their Christian calling, as their primary distinguishing mark. We note with wry amusement, for example, that whereas the priest-poet R. S. Thomas (as an Anglican) is described as a Christian writer, Graham Greene was always referred to as a Catholic one, as though the Christian calling wasn't quite up to scratch. Admittedly a good deal of such nomenclature can be attributed to the media, who love building up mystique (and who, most ironically, regard Roman Catholics very much like ecclesiastical freemasons), but we recognize also that anxious labelling of this kind[1] can spring from an insecurity, inappropriate to today's increasingly relaxed atmosphere.

In the face of the obsessive labelling syndrome, the ecumenical scene has need of someone in a baggy suit, the easy-going bumbler of the common room who, feeling he has nothing to lose, will be sufficiently at ease with himself to take the lead. This is the vocation of the Anglican Communion, in working for more effective ecumenical co-operation between different Christian traditions in the same locality. Because ecclesiastical one-upmanship is not our cup of tea, the political manoeuvring of others often pass us by, and when we notice at all, we are amused rather than angry. In joint projects Anglicans will tend to put 75 per cent of the cash on the table and cheerfully allow the others 75 per cent of the say, but that's the way we are. In the end we cannot quite bring ourselves to be any other way, stubbornly

believing that there are very few ecclesiastical principles which are matters of life and death, the gospel setting other priorities before us.

So nowadays the Anglican household is accepted by many as a kind, old, easy-going auntie figure who has lots of people round to tea with no questions asked, who serves good cakes and has left a bit in her will to simply everyone. She's often taken for a ride by the rogues in the neighbourhood, and spitefully mocked by the arrogant upstarts recently converted to the latest enthusiasm. But she smiles on through it all, winning our respect as well as our affection, the older we get. Because she's never pushy we all feel comfortable at going back to see her, no matter how long we've been away or how far we've travelled.

When it comes to relations with other faiths, the same gradual evolution from the primeval slime can be seen at work. When I was ordained, the definitive text on the question of Christianity and other religions was John 14:6, straight from the shoulder, both barrels: 'No one comes to the Father except through me.' Living in a street with a Sikh neighbour on one side and a Muslim on the other, I now find such unthinking triumphalism an embarrassment. The development in thought underlying this change in perception (in which I don't think I am alone) can be attributed largely to the fact that England, certainly as far as our major urban conurbations are concerned, is now a multi-cultural and multi-faith society.

Moving ten years ago from mono-cultural Peterborough to multi-cultural Huddersfield required a theological shift as well as a removal van. The experience at Junior School of our six-year-old daughter helped bring it home to us. Whereas in the post-Christian culture of Peterborough hardly anyone in her class believed in God, in her Huddersfield class (in which she was one of only four white faces) everyone did.

Living in a parish where the most active and vibrant community of faith is the local Sikh gurdwara, I am humbled

again and again by the Christ-like people I have come to know from the other great religious traditions, making parallel journeys to God. Like all religions (including Christianity) they have their nutters and their evil men hiding behind religious slogans and ecclesiastical status, but if we concentrate on those genuine souls seeking God and seeking holiness, then they have as much to give as to learn. We may have found the supreme way and the most straightforward route, but there are still some useful short cuts to be discovered if only we have the humility to listen to other experienced travellers.

To take but one example, we can be very snooty about our unique experience of praying to God as 'Dad' through Jesus our Lord, but perhaps it's time we grew up. Whereas the prayer of Islam, for instance, seems to be a paean of praise to God who is great and magnificent and holy, and an affirmation of obedience to his will, the prayer of Christianity seems all too often characterized by petition rather than praise. For all our intimacy with God, won for us by Jesus Christ, we can exhibit an immature dependency on God, typical of a 'rights and benefits' society emasculated by an over-protective welfare state.

The Christian track record on this front has been very shaky indeed, and Anglicans have contributed more than their six pennyworth to the cause of Christian imperialism on the world stage.

The long history of persecution of the Jews redounds to Christianity's eternal shame, and will no doubt prove to be one of the supreme ironies of human history – Jews being harassed and put to death by the alleged followers of the most famous Jew of all time. The nadir of the Christian story with regard to other faiths, however, must surely be the Crusades in which, from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, an unholy alliance of the Church and the military attempted to wrest the Holy Places of Palestine from Islam. Amazingly, the very last attempt to use force in

converting others to the cause of the Prince of Peace was not until 1543, when Henry VIII joined forces with the Emperor Charles V to mount an expedition to fight the Turks. This was mainly a political ploy to get at the French (with whom the Turks had formed an alliance), but nevertheless Cranmer was required to act as chief recruiting officer for this 'holy' piece of thuggery.

The Crusades show just how easy it is to lose sight of the wood of the common search for God, through fixing attention on this particular Jewish or Muslim tree. They also reveal a Christian fixation with territorial space that has no support whatsoever from the recorded teachings of Jesus of Nazareth or from early Christian practice. It is astonishing to us today that such a saintly luminary as Bernard of Clairvaux, he of the lyrical sermons on the Song of Songs, should have exhorted Christians to throw themselves bloodthirstily on the infidels in the Second Crusade of 1147, and should have upbraided them, in their subsequent military failure, for their lack of *faith*! Today we reap a bitter harvest in the shape of militant Muslim fundamentalism.

In more recent centuries, Anglicans, in common with all Christian churches of the West, channelled this crusading zeal into overseas missionary work on a vast scale. Evangelicals and Catholics, each founding their own missionary societies,[2] vied with each other to excel in the work of exporting God the Englishman to the four corners of the globe. Tremendous heroic work was done, and the booming churches of Africa are today a particularly fruitful harvest from that faithful and sacrificial sowing. At the same time, it was difficult if not impossible for missionaries from great colonial powers to separate spiritual from cultural evangelization in the days when enculturation of the gospel was a distant concept, glimpsed by only the far-sighted pioneer.

Friends are rightly envious when they learn that one third of our parish community in Huddersfield is Afro-Caribbean,

but they mistakenly imagine that our worship is thereby characterized by exuberance and lack of inhibition. They forget that those from the West Indies who worship with us now are the products of a long process of reverse-enculturation by the Anglican Church in distant lands, which, instead of retelling the Christian story in local dialect, required the locals to learn a new language of worship which was alien to them and through which their natural characteristics were suppressed. As a result, our brothers and sisters from the West Indies for example, have been lumbered with dress codes and behaviour patterns for worship, reminiscent of our own pre-war culture, that we ourselves have long discarded. In our own small way we have done a bit of a St Bernard.

In the face of all that has gone before, the glorious, the good, and the missing of the mark, we can thank God today for prophets such as Hans Küng (another honorary Anglican) who recall us to a new beginning, in penitence and faith, alongside Jew and Muslim, with whom we share spiritual descent from Abraham. These three great monotheistic religions, sharing three interwoven revelations of the one true God, should together be the pathfinders of a new 'alliance for God' in the face of the hedonistic materialism that is overwhelming the Western world. Even that fierce defender of the English Church, Dr Samuel Johnson, was moved to remark, '... and as to religion, have we heard all that a disciple of Confucius, all that a Mahometan, can say for himself?'[3]

In the context of English cities, where so many church schools are multi-cultural, Anglicans could have a particular part to play in pioneering a new religious education syllabus expressing, not a watered down Christian faith giving offence to no one, but a brave new RE syllabus for all God-seekers. This would draw on the teachings of scriptures and prophets of each great religious tradition, to affirm and celebrate the common inheritance of faith shared by the three great monotheistic religions which can look to

Abraham as their founder, and which together, but only together, might have something to offer to a frantically pleasure-seeking world.

Only a step of this magnitude would do justice to the critical situation we face when Western European culture has for all intents and purposes forsaken God, and finds, on the occasions it turns to religion to ask for bread, merely the barren stone of religious confrontation, both between major faiths and within them. The warning of Jesus of Nazareth that only by their fruits will people of truth and peace and justice be recognized needs to ring in our ears a lot more loudly and incessantly. Anglicans, by virtue of our own history and characteristics, could do a lot to turn up the volume.

16

Where Do We Go From Here?

Becoming an Anglican is rather like crossing a frontier into a new country. This new country is not a foreign land, but our deepest selves recognized for the first time. To quote T. S. Eliot again:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.[1]

Although we will have to learn new things – a new language of worship and thought perhaps, new ways of seeing things and responding to events – the process is primarily a journey, and a journey inwards. In his book, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell draws together the themes common to all the great religious quests, across the world and throughout history, and clearly discerns the journey inward as an experience known to all seekers after truth:

> ... we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the centre of our existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.[2]

In an English context, becoming an Anglican is inevitably bound up with developing an instinctive approach to things which is quintessentially English – those qualities that I have attempted to identify in the previous chapters. In other parts of the world that Englishness may be very muted, but it is there nevertheless, enriching our striving to build local Christian communities that are free, exploratory, dignified, joyous and open (and of course understated, and of course with a sense of humour).

You will find the immigration officials at the frontier into this new century kindness itself. They will not glower at you as they compare you with that ridiculous passport photograph, nor will they interrogate you or try to catch you out, or demand that you open your suitcase. On the whole we are fairly laid-back about instruction courses – a few chats with the parish priest in his study is sometimes all you will get – but we have no intention of being made to feel inadequate on this score. We believe that Christian initiation is 90 per cent incorporation and 10 per cent indoctrination; we know that we can offer *real* community, intimate and demanding, where the Risen Lord is encountered, not just in the breaking of bread, but in the coffee-drinking, the prayer-group meeting, the lift-giving, and the churchyard maintenance rota. That's where we rest our case, at the sharp point of the Christian life.

As you would expect, it's all very low-key, and free and easy. Confirmation is a simple and straightforward ceremony which no one need find daunting. It's best of course if you're an adult, so that the event can be a real dedication of your whole self to God, a kind of 'lay ordination', a joyous confirmation of the 'provisional booking' made on your behalf at your baptism as an infant. It's best if it can take place at the Easter Vigil, imaginatively celebrated to recall the whole community to the Christian mystery of death and rebirth, and if you're not already baptized, so much the better, as then you may experience in one glorious go the

whole shooting match of baptism, confirmation and first communion.

If you've already been confirmed by a bishop in another tradition then all that is required is your public acceptance of the sufficiency of Anglican doctrine and worship and of your new bishop's authority. This is called Reception into the Church of England, usually by the bishop but sometimes by your parish priest acting on his behalf.

All this means that the process of becoming an Anglican is not so much a question of becoming a 'convert' or of crossing a line, more a case of being enveloped in a new way of life, a new way of seeing things. And the newness will be found in new assumptions and attitudes which creep up on you unnoticed, rather than in any strident banging of a newly acquired drum.

For this reason you will find many of us uneasy about the very term 'Anglican' or even 'C of E' used as a description of a denominational group; much of the point of becoming an Anglican is that you are not a denomination but the Church of a country, no more, no less. Only those who have opted out of the national Church have need to define themselves further. Noticeboards outside Anglican church buildings need only say 'parish church', for no further description is necessary. Other Christian groups may feel the need to announce their separate identity with further adjectives. Anglicans do not. Although Anglicans from around the world may bridle at this innate Englishness (or perhaps we had better say Britishness for the sake of our good fellow-Anglicans in the rest of these islands), nevertheless this legacy of Englishness is something that binds us together around the world in our Anglican Communion of autonomous provinces.

In England, of course, Anglicanism is used to describe all that pertains to the Church of England, but here we are forced to recognize that the precise nature of the Church of England is as elusive as the nature of Englishness, or Britishness, itself.

Like Britain itself which, though lacking a written constitution, has provided a model for democratic government for emergent nations across the world, so the Church of England, while lacking a definite 'confession of faith' peculiar to itself, provides a model for the reunited Christian Church of the future; a Church in which disparate opinions and traditions are held together in creative tension and mutual love. The Church of England was never founded; like Topsy, it just grew, evolving slowly from a time nobody quite knows when, in a manner nobody quite knows how. Inevitably therefore, the 'ism' of Anglicanism is misleading. It suggests a well-honed co-ordinated system of belief, whereas what we have is more like a loose federation of ideas and attitudes, instinctive approaches and ways of doing things. All these elements cohere, fairly miraculously, into a quite distinctive way of life, easily recognizable and uncannily difficult to eradicate, at once both charming and infuriating.

Tied up as it is with the mysteries of Englishness, Anglicanism today runs the risk of being hijacked by the heritage industry and turned into a religious theme park. There are many in England who, in summoning up the ghost of England Past, would give the Church a leading role in a nostalgic trip down memory lane, rekindling folk-memories of cricket on the village green, warm beer, and ladies cycling to Evensong. Here is the quiescent, subservient Church, affectionately remembered, but kept in a drawer in the spare room, for special occasions only.

But that would be to tell only part of the story. The Church of England may have appeared to some as a lugubrious worm, spineless and aimless, but it has proved itself to be a worm that turns. Now and again its bishops can become troublesome, whether Thomas Becket biting the royal hand that had fed him, Thomas Ken and his fellow Non-Jurors refusing in 1690 to bow the knee to the Dutch Protestant William, or in recent times, Robert Runcie clipping the wings of Margaret Thatcher's jingoism after the Falklands conflict.

We paddle along, rather than battle on, just occasionally surprising ourselves by getting something exactly right, and even producing a saint or two in the process (although we would never dream of saying so).

Setting down these few notes has prompted in me the most un-Anglican thought that I am, after all, rather *proud* to be an Anglican. I see just how often we *have* got it right, even though by accident rather than by design, and how good it is to breathe the fresh Anglican air. I have been reminded how richly blessed we are, and it would be good to think that something I have said may prompt you to come and share these blessings with us, and yourself become a blessing to enrich further our life together in this sometimes faltering but hopeful and quietly confident journey which is the Anglican approach to God.

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise,
that when we were still far off you met us in your Son
and brought us home.
Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and
opened the gate of glory.
May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;
we who drink his cup bring life to others;
we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.
Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,
so we and all your children shall be free,
and the whole earth live to praise your name;
through Christ our Lord.

Prayer after Communion
The Alternative Service Book 1980

Notes

2. *What's In a Name?*

1. Samuel Seabury (1729–96) was the first bishop of the Episcopal Church in the USA. Elected bishop in 1783, his consecration by English bishops was precluded by his inability to take the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown, the States having become independent. He was instead consecrated by Scottish bishops in Aberdeen on 14 November 1784.

3. *To Begin at the Beginning*

1. 'The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.' Words spoken by the bishop to a new parish priest in the Service of Institution and Induction, Diocese of Wakefield.
2. The Supremacy of the Crown Act 1534. This legislation was repeated by Mary and toned down by Elizabeth I. Elizabeth's Act of Supremacy 1558 declared the Queen to be 'the only supreme governor of this realm, and of all her highness's dominions and countries, as well in all spiritual and ecclesiatical things or causes as temporal'.
3. Cranmer's sister, Alice Cranmer, had been Prioress of Minster Abbey in Kent.
4. The work of translating the Bible into English began in the late fourteenth century, but did not gain the Church's backing until Miles Coverdale's version of 1535. Other versions followed, culminating in the Authorized Version of 1611, which remained the basic text until the twentieth century.

5. 'Was this, then, a new Church or the old Church reformed and restored? If it is necessary, as Boniface VIII affirmed, for the salvation of every human creature that he should be subject to the Bishop of Rome, then the position of the Church of England is indefensible. But, if we look to Scripture, to the life of the early Church, to the great central tradition of the Church through all the centuries, we may come to think that the Church of England in the reign of Elizabeth I was right in claiming, as it claims today, that it and no other body is the Catholic Church in England.' Stephen Neil, *Anglicanism*, Pelican, 1960, p. 132.
6. I have avoided use of the term 'apostolic succession', meaning an unbroken succession of episcopal ordinations from the time of the apostles to the present day. This romantic notion cannot be proved by any church, only asserted, and gives far too much scope for the controversialists who love to spoil the picnic with accusations of broken chains or deficient intention.

   Bearing in mind that controversialists on both sides can give as good as they get, and that there seems to be a fairly equal division of skeletons in cupboards, let's concentrate on continuity of *life*, with the *intention* of an unbroken line of commissioning through our bishops.
7. 'Evangelical' in this context needs to be distinguished from 'evangelistic'. 'Evangelical' refers to a recognizable movement or party of like-minded individuals within the Church embracing the biblical faith outlined above. 'Evangelistic' describes an attribute of the whole Church pertaining to our shared commission to be messengers of good news (gospel=evangel). While every Christian without exception therefore is called to be evangelistic, not every Christian will be an Evangelical.
8. 'The elaboration of the Tractarian answer issued in a special theory of the Church of England, to which Newman gave the name of the *Via Media*.' Geoffrey Faber, *Oxford Apostles*, Pelican, 1954, p. 324.
9. The term 'Anglo-Catholic' is now rather dated.
10. Being rather hard of hearing, the Church of England managed to complete since the War three major cathedrals – Liverpool, Coventry and Guildford – which took not a scrap of notice of the Liturgical Movement and which as a result now look like beached whales.

11. '... the Church of England had shown plainly that it would not walk the way of either Geneva or Rome. This was the origin of the famous *Via Media*, the middle way, of the Church of England.' Neil, ibid, p. 119.

4. *Building Blocks: Essential Elements of Anglicanism*

1. The four articles of faith originating with the Episcopal Church of the United States at its Chicago Convention of 1886, and formally adopted by the Lambeth Conference of all Anglican bishops in 1888, list the Apostles' Creed, the two Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, and the Historical Episcopate as the three essentials (alongside the Holy Scriptures) of a reunited Christian Church.
2. T. S. Eliot, 'Four Quartets: Little Gidding' in *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, Book Club Associates, 1977, p. 197.
3. 'For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move.' Robert Louis Stevenson, *Travels with a Donkey*, Cheylard and Luc.
4. Fr Raymond Raynes, Superior of the Community of the Resurrection 1943 to 1958.
5. John Robinson (1919–83), bishop and theologian.

5. *From Chains to CD Rom: The Anglican Elements of Anglicanism*

1. Ronald Knox, *A New Testament Commentary III*, Burns & Oates, 1956.
2. 'Most critics today reject the Petrine authorship.' Introduction to the Letters to All Christians, 1966 edition of the *Jerusalem Bible*.
3. 'II Thess. was not meant to comment on I Thess. but to *displace* it.' Gerd Ludemann, *Heretics*, SCM, 1996, p. 112.
4. 'What is there here beneath, better than fire, water, meats, drinks, metals of gold, silver, iron, and steel? Yet we see daily great harm and much mischief done by every one of these, as well for lack of wisdom and providence of them that suffer evil, as by malice of them that worketh evil. ... Wherefore I would advise you all, that cometh of the reading or hearing of this book, which is the word of God, the most precious jewel, and most holy relic that remaineth upon earth, that ye bring with you the fear of God, and that ye do it with all due reverence, and use your knowledge thereof, not to vainglory or frivolous disputation, but to the

honour of God, increase of virtue, and edification both of yourselves and other.' Thomas Cranmer, Preface to the Great Bible (Second Impression 1540).

5. Don't worry too much about which one you choose, as long as you end up with a version that makes sense of it for you. The Authorized (or King James) Version of 1611 continues to be sold, but is not recommended that you start with this version.

6. *Dogmas and Dugouts: The Anglican Approach to Doctrine*

1. 'There are no special Anglican doctrines, there is no particular Anglican theology. The Church of England is the Catholic Church in England. It teaches all the doctrines of the Catholic Faith, as these are to be found in Holy Scripture, as they are summarised in the ... Creeds, and as they are set forth in the decisions of the first four General Councils of the undivided Church.' Stephen Neil, *Anglicanism*, Pelican, 1960, p. 417.
2. 'Before working out in any way what is specifically Christian, it is important to stress just how much Christianity has in common with Judaism and Islam.' Hans Küng, *Christianity*, SCM Press, 1995, p. 29.
3. Answer on being asked her opinion of Christ's presence in the Sacrament. S. Clarke, *Marrow of Ecclesiastical History*, 1675 edn, pt ii, Life of Queen Elizabeth.
4. The three post-apostolic doctrines decreed by Rome as necessary to salvation are: the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1854); the Infallibility of the Pope (1870); and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1950).
5. Anglicans gain some wry amusement from the Vatican's horrified reaction to the Church of England's presumption in 'going it alone' in ordaining women to the priesthood in 1994; we recall that somewhere in the Gospels is a story of Jesus about a beam and a mote ...
6. Recent examples are the Doctrine Commission's reports 'We Believe in the Holy Spirit' (1991) and 'The Mystery of Salvation' (1995).
7. The task is 'to go on looking for the truth, with no reservations of any kind, to follow where love leads, to trust in life, to glory in the depth and the mystery, and not be afraid of what may be found in the depth and through the mystery'. John Robinson quoted in Eric James, *John Robinson*.

8. 'Do not seek orthodoxy, seek the truth.' Abbé Huvelin quoted in Marvin O'Connell, *Critics on Trial*, CUA Press, 1994.
9. Ibid.
10. Dairmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, Yale, 1996, p. 342.

7. *Us and Me: The Anglican Approach to the Church*

1. 'A new stage in history calls for a new style of priesthood. What will its nature be? ... How are we to minister in today's culture, where formal religion is disregarded but spirituality is treasured?' Roderick Strange, Chairman of the National Conference of Priests, in *The Tablet*, 27 September 1997.
2. 'It is hard to imagine any other institution which could have provided the solemnity and dignity required by the Princess of Wales' funeral ... Nowhere could have provided the vehicle for the overwhelming emotion and sense of the historic. At a point of national trauma, Westminster Abbey provided a reassuring sense of continuity.' Madeleine Bunting in the *Guardian*, 13 September 1997.
3. 'Cranmer came to hate the papacy, and therefore he needed the Royal Supremacy to fill the chasm of authority which had opened up in his thinking as a result ... in this he revealed a breathtaking scepticism about any independent character for the church.' MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, pp. 15 and 78.
4. 'The most spectacular single piece of iconoclasm so far in the English Church.' Ibid., p. 227.
5. A recent example which gave heart to us all was the brave decision of President Mary McAleese (a Roman Catholic) to receive Holy Communion at an Anglican Eucharist in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, shortly after her Inauguration.

8. *Bouquets and Bandages: The Anglican Approach to the Sacraments*

1. 'The open table fellowship of Jesus was thus perceived as a challenge to the purity system. And it was; the meals of Jesus embodied his alternative vision of an inclusive community.' Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus again for the first time*, Harper, 1994.
2. Preaching in 1547, Bishop Nicholas Ridley affirmed the Real Presence but discouraged all speculation about its nature. They were, he said, 'worse than dogs and hogs, that would ask the question "How he was there present" '. MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, p. 378.

3. 'The art of ritual-making does not enslave, it frees. Ritual-making is an experience of liberation. Sadly, some people cannot tolerate the insecurity of freedom. Like the Israelites who complained to Moses in the desert, they prefer slavery.' Gerard Pottebaum, *The Rites of People*, The Pastoral Press, 1992.

9. *Decently and in Order: The Anglican Approach to Worship*

1. 'And the service itself [for Diana, Princess of Wales] was the Church of England at its undeniable best, supremely self-assured in its calm ceremony, pomp and quiet circumstance. It was nicely discreet about its Christianity for a plural society, welcoming and non-judgmental: the perfect recipe for an established Church on the verge of the millennium.' Madeleine Bunting in the *Guardian*, 13 September 1997.
2. Colin Buchanan, *News of Liturgy*, June 1997.
3. Preface to the first Prayer Book (1549).
4. Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dacre Press, 1945.
5. Preface to the first Prayer Book 1549.
6. The best place in all England in which to get the feel of all this is the tiny church at Little Gidding, Cambridgeshire, where in the seventeenth century a saint of a man called Nicholas Ferrar, a brilliant academic and a gifted MP, forsook the glittering prizes to hide himself away in rural obscurity to seek God and to gather around him a community of men and women. Utterly Anglican in spirit, the little community centred its life on the Divine Office recited daily in that beautiful and evocative place, hanging on gravely until the Civil War and the Puritan backlash finally engulfed them in 1646.
7. *Celebrating Common Prayer – A Version of the Daily Office SSF*, Mowbray, 1992.
8. Anglican Church Planting Initiatives can be contacted at Crookes Endowed Centre, Crookes, Sheffield S10 1UB, tel. 0114 267 8447.
9. Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *God the Future of Man*, Sheed and Ward, 1968.

10. *Learning Good Habits: The Anglican Approach to Prayer*

1. David Jenkins, *Still Living with Questions*, SCM Press, 1990.
2. Christopher Scott, *Between the Poles*, New Millennium, 1996.
3. Ibid.
4. Taizé Service, Norwich Cathedral, 29 November 1995.

11. *Checks and Balances: The Anglican Approach to Authority*

1. It is generally agreed that the Pastoral Epistles – 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus – although attributed to Paul, were written later by followers of his.
2. Various editions of the *Didache* are in circulation, one of which is included in Maxwell Staniforth, ed., *Early Christian Writings*, Penguin, 1968.

12. *Loitering with Intent: The Anglican Approach to Membership*

1. 'It is lamentable that the vast majority of believers are confessing – not to say droning out – something every Sunday at worship which they no longer understand.' Ludemann, *Heretics*, p. 190.
2. 'Through them the individual Christian can enrol himself in the communion of all Christianity.' Wolfgang Pannenberg, *The Apostles Creed in the Light of Today's Questions*, 1973.
3. 'Religion is for me a journey of continual discovery in which I feel at home in the Church of England. ... The Anglican Church has encouraged me with the freedom to explore.' Dame Cecily Saunders in *The Tablet*, 6 December 1997.

13. *Seeing Both Sides: The Anglican Approach to Moral Questions*

1. *Three Men in a Boat*, Jerome K. Jerome, 1889, Spring Books, 1977, p. 91.
2. 'But for the grace of God there goes John Bradford.' John Bradford (1510–55) 'Exclamation on seeing some criminals on their way to execution.' *Dictionary of National Biography*.
3. 1 Corinthians 9:27.
4. The Matrimonial Causes Act 1965 (Section 8(2)).
5. Canon Residentiary of Newcastle Cathedral 1964–85.
6. MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, p. 58. Sadly, Cranmer toned down the original Sarum version of the wife's promise to be 'bonner and buxom in bed and at the board'.

14. *Sending Us Out: The Anglican Approach to the Wider Community*

1. 'It is said that a third of the Cabinet are members of the Christian Socialist Movement.' Clifford Longley in *The Tablet*, 19 July 1997.

2. 'The concept of a God who suffers here and now, daily and hourly because it is the divine will to be involved forever with the sins and follies of mankind, was central to Studdert Kennedy's thought.' William Purcell, *Woodbine Willie*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1962, p. 15.
3. Matthew 9:36.
4. Luke 8:21.

15. *Taking a Lower Seat: The Anglican Approach to Other Traditions and Faiths*

1. 'If you are looking for a Catholic cook-book, the Two Fat Ladies, perhaps the most celebrated Catholics in Britain, have written again. It's not Catholic in content, so much as in spirit.' Melanie McDonagh in *The Tablet*, 6 December 1997.
2. Among the many Anglican societies founded to promote overseas missionary work, the two most prominent were the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (1701) and the Church Missionary Society (1799). In 1965, the former merged with the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (1857) to form the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.
3. James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, Penguin, 1986.

16. *Where Do We Go from Here?*

1. T. S. Eliot, 'Four Quartets: Little Gidding' in *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, Book Club Associates, 1977, p. 197.
2. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 25.

We do not presume...

These words from the prayer of humble access from the Eucharist do more than prepare us to receive bread and wine: they sum up what it means to be an Anglican Christian.

Charismatics, catholics, evangelicals, liberals - and no doubt a few agnostics - happily co-exist (apart from the odd earth tremor) in a world-wide family which is renowned for its rich diversity and its ability to tolerate, and even celebrate, other points of view. Even the famous Anglican skill of sitting glued to the fence on complex moral issues may be less a sign of dithering than a humble acknowledgement that some questions are too important for knee-jerk reactions or quick-fix responses.

At its best, this spirit of openness to each other is a sign of openness to the Holy Spirit. Anglicans would never presume to have 'arrived' spiritually and the door is open to all who are seeking God. If you are considering visiting your parish church, or 'joining up' through baptism and confirmation, this down-to-earth guide will leave you in no doubt about what you will discover. If you have been 'C of E' since the cradle, you may be surprised to find just how far back into history and how widely around the world this family of faith extends.

'An intriguing, inviting and accessible book...a wonderful welcome to the Church of England.'

Canon Robert Warren

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